

120
S E R M O N S

ON

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND

HENRY STEBBING, D.D. *K*

PREACHER TO THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY
OF GRAY'S-INN,

CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY,

AND

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL AND ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETIES.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE CHARACTER
OF THE AUTHOR,

BY HIS SON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR C. DILLY, IN THE POULTRY.

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TO THE
WORSHIPFUL THE
READERS AND BENCHERS
OF THE
HONOURABLE SOCIETY
OF GRAY'S-INN.

GENTLEMEN,

HAVING so long had the honour of being your Preacher, it is with the greatest propriety, that, in giving these my labours to the world; they should be dedicated to you, under whose kind patronage and protection they were written, and in whose Chapel they were delivered; and I sincerely wish their merit equalled the generosity which their Author has amply experienced from the Society.

To you, Gentlemen, I present them, as an instance of the great regard I have for the Honourable Society of Gray's-Inn, and as a memorial of the liberality and friendship which has, for near half a century, been uniformly shewn to my father, your former Preacher, and to myself, succeeding him in that honourable office.

GENTLEMEN,

I have the Honour to be,

with all possible Respect,

Your most obedient

Gray's Inn,
22 Oct 1787.

Humble Servant,

HENRY STEBBING.

PREFACE.

P R E F A C E.

THE following discourses were composed for the Chapel of the Honourable Society of Gray's-Inn, (of which Society the Author has been for many years the Preacher :) — and they are printed from the original MSS. exactly as they were preached, which is judged a better manner of giving them to the world, than, by new modelling, to throw them into a more systematic form.

The first five Sermons are introductory to the doctrines of the Christian Religion, beginning with the Jewish Dispensation, as being in itself preparatory to the future Christian Dispensation — this is the subject of the two first Sermons. The third and fourth are as a second step in the grand purpose of the salvation of man — namely, the promise of the kingdom of Christ to David. And the fifth is on the Mission of St. Paul to the Gentiles. — These are selected, as a proper foundation for inculcating the practice of the Christian duties, which is the subject of the remaining part of these volumes.

In making this selection, the Author has chosen those Sermons only which point out and enforce the duties of a Christian. Contested and abstruse points of divinity, are subjects highly proper to be treated at certain times; but at present the intention is, to speak to *all*, on subjects with which *all* ought to be well acquainted;—and, as we cannot perform our duty without knowing what it is, the plainer the language telling us that duty, the better. Simple and important truths do not want the aid of elaborate reasoning, or of high-wrought language;—every one may understand a plain style, and the more informed, cannot be offended at it.

The Author's original view was—from the pulpit to inculcate the Christian Religion, by instructing the ignorant, and persuading the more learned in their duty; and now that he gives his labours to the world, his remaining object is, to enable them more maturely to consider their duty.

May God bless his endeavours, and permit him thus to be the means of conveying those duties to the human heart, which HE in his goodness has thought fit to require of us, through his only Son Jesus Christ!

THE Author of the following Sermons had transmitted the original manuscripts to the press, and had written the Dedication and Preface a few weeks before his death.— As therefore, by that event, they appear a posthumous work, I think it a duty which I owe to his memory, to submit to the world a short account of his character.

He was the eldest son of the Reverend Dr. Stebbing, Chancellor of Sarum, well known to the learned world by his many able polemical writings.

His mother was the daughter of Mr. Robert Camel, of Eye, of a very respectable family in the county of Suffolk.

He was born at Rickinghall in that county, (of which parish his father was then Rector) on the 18th of March 1716.

At an early age he was put to the public school at Bury in Suffolk, where he laid the foundation for that great proficiency he acquired in the study of theology. From thence he was removed, in the year 1734, to Catherine Hall, Cambridge, where he passed through the several academical gradations, to the senior fellowship of that college, with the greatest credit and reputation. Here, as well as at school, by the sweetness of his disposition, he formed friendships with many, who afterwards became distinguished characters of the age; which, though it was not a means of his future advancement in life (for reasons which will be mentioned hereafter), yet was a lasting

a lasting pleasure and honour to him.

From his college he received first, the living of Coton, near Cambridge, and afterwards, on resigning that, the consolidated living of Gimmingham and Trunch, in the county of Norfolk, to which he was instituted in the year 1749, and which he held to his death.

He was, in the year 1750, by the Honourable Society of Gray's-Inn, chosen their Preacher, upon the resignation of his father: and soon afterwards appointed Chaplain in Ordinary to the late King, also on his father's resignation, in which office he was continued by his present Majesty.

In the year 1753, he was chosen Sunday afternoon lecturer of the parish of St. Catharine Cree, near the
Tower,

X S O M E A C C O U N T

Tower, which he gave up in 1760, for the Sunday afternoon lectureship of the parish of St. Lawrence Jewry, which he held till a year before his death.

He took his degree of Doctor in Divinity, at the commencement at Cambridge, July 1759. And he was also a Fellow of the Royal and Antiquarian Societies.

In the year 1751 he married Jane, one of the daughters of the late Robert Smith, Esq. of Mortlake, in the county of Surry, an eminent merchant of the city of London; by whom he has left one only son Henry, a barrister at law.

He was never desirous of establishing a reputation as an author; and consequently did not appear to the public in print, except as the editor of an edition of his father's works,
and

and as the author of a few occasional sermons, which he was under obligations to publish.

By his not putting himself forward to the notice of the world, as an author, his character as a scholar, and a man of taste for letters, was not so generally known: but the great reputation he acquired in the discharge of his ministry, as well as the testimony of those who had the happiness of his acquaintance, prove that he was as truly a learned, as he was a good man: and the many little pieces he wrote, for the amusement of himself and his friends, shew the purity, elegance, and variety of his poetic talents. What he wrote in this way, was as replete with wit, sensibility, and harmony of numbers, as it was free from severity and ill-nature: and his translations of some of the classics evince
how

how fully he entered into their spirit and beauty. But—learning was not considered by him so much an ornament, as an useful material ; and, so far as it was subservient to the cause of religion, he admired, cultivated, and applied it. His chief object—for ambition he had none—was, to fix the true principles of Christianity in the minds of others ; and to enforce the duties of it, by persuasion, by argument, and by example. This object he pursued with unremitted attention, from his appointment to Gray's-Inn, by preaching in the chapel of that Society every Sunday morning, and at his lectureship in the city in the afternoon, with very little intermission, for a period of near forty years. And so closely did he apply himself to his studies, that, for the greatest part of that time,

time, it was his usual practice to compose one sermon at least in a week, often more.

The humility of his mind, while it cast a lustre on his other virtues, was a reason why he was not advanced to a more exalted station in life. From this disposition it was, that he could not be induced to take those steps for soliciting preferment, so universally adopted by the world; but from hence also it was, that he avoided those anxieties of mind which ever flow from disappointed ambition. — Contented with the comfortable situation in which Providence had placed him, he rather preferred a constant and quiet application to his studies, and as constant an attendance upon the public duties of his pulpits, to a station more conspicuous, but at the same time more dangerous — where the truly good

good man, perhaps, has reason to lament the want of leisure and opportunity to discharge his duty.

The account of the life of such a man, will contain few interesting facts of a public nature, for his concerns with the world were few. In the history of a man's life is generally seen the progress of his various pursuits; how he succeeded and how he was disappointed in them; what disputes, discontents, and controversies followed each other, from his coming into life to his going out of it; how one enemy was overcome, and by what means another was appeased. But these subjects cannot make a part in the life of Dr. Stebbing. His only pursuit was the exemplary discharge of his duty; disputes and controversies he did not engage in — and an enemy he never had — Of disappointments as few —
perhaps

perhaps fewer than any man ; and, added to this, it pleased God to give him a life of upwards of seventy years, without afflicting him with any considerable illness. But though there may be no great and striking occurrences in his life, to arrest the attention, and to set him forth in a peculiar manner to public observation — yet, taking the whole of it together, it is an object well worthy of regard and of admiration ; it presents a most remarkable and pleasing picture of pure integrity, virtuous tranquillity, and religious industry united — in one whom God was pleased to shelter from the more turbulent stations in life, to pursue the most important of all studies, for the benefit of mankind.

With a mind formed for the practice of every social virtue, and an heart
open

open to the tenderest feelings of sensibility and affection, he was, while his parents remained, an illustrious example of filial duty; on every occasion, with a most ready hand, administering to their comfort and happiness; and, after their death, paying the most reverential marks of respect to their memory. His character as husband, parent, and brother, was no less eminent;—in which the same benign principle of love, and the same tender feelings and affection, guided every action and pervaded every sentiment.—The delight and ornament of his family! — *their* comfort, *their* welfare, *their* enjoyments, were the nearest wish of his heart, and the constant object of his endeavours. The influence of his amiable qualities however, did not stop here, but also procured him the valuable possession of the
love

love and esteem of a truly respectable circle of friends, who were ever emulous to shew the high veneration they had for him, by numberless instances of attention.

His philanthropy, as it was a guide to his conduct through life, so was it the spirit in which his discourses were both written and preached. His mode of arguing was solid, connected, and clear. What he delivered from the pulpit, was conveyed with energy, and at the same time with persuasive mildness; so that the Infidel returned home, convinced of his errors — and the timid, and broken in heart, soothed and comforted. Fully satisfied with the rectitude and certainty of the doctrine on which Christianity is founded, and steadily adhering to the tenets of the church of England, he had the happy power; by a pecu-

liar simplicity of style, and clearness of method, to explain the scriptures to the meanest capacity; and by setting forth the great truths of religion in the strongest points of view, to confute the opinions of scepticism and infidelity.

His mild and persuasive manner was as remarkable in his private conversation, as in his preaching. Gentleness and urbanity ever taking the lead, attended by cheerfulness and good-nature. Possessed of an exquisite taste for wit, and of talents to give wit all its force, yet was it never tinged with moroseness, severity, or ill-nature; but was a means to convey only the effusions of a sprightly mind, at peace with itself and with all the world: thus affording a beautiful instance, that laborious study, and a strict attention to religious duties, so far from fettering and sour-

ing the human mind, on the contrary, extend, soften, and adorn it.

To sum up his character in a word, — he was truly a good Christian, for he lived in the strict observance of the doctrine he taught.

The goodness of Providence, as it was eminently extended to him, through an easy life, so was it most benignly displayed, in the manner in which it pleased God to take him hence. Without suffering any bodily pain, he gradually declined in strength until the hand of death was *most gently* laid upon him — when, calm and composed — he resigned a virtuous life into the HANDS OF HIS MAKER.

He died in the seventy-second year of his age, at his house in Gray's-Inn, on the 13th of November 1787; and was buried at Richmond, in the county of Surry.

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 laid upon him—when, calm
 and composed—he resigned a virtuous
 life into the hands of his Maker.

He died in the seventy-second year
 of his age, at his home in Great-
 Inn, on the 13th of November 1775,
 and was buried at Richmond, in the
 country of Surrey.

C O N T E N T S

O F T H E F I R S T V O L U M E.

S E R M O N I.

The Jewish Dispensation.

EXOD. xix. 3, 4, 5, 6. *Moses went up unto God: and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel:—Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.—Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation.* — P. I.

xxii CONTENTS.

SERMON II.

The same Subject continued. p. 15.

SERMON III.

The Promise of the Christian Dispensation
to David.

2 SAM. vii. 12, 13, 14. *I will set up thy seed after thee, and I will establish his kingdom; he shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.—I will be his father, and he shall be my son.* - - - p. 29.

SERMON IV.

The same Subject continued. p. 43.

SERMON V.

The Mission of St. Paul to the Gentiles.

ACTS ix. 15. *The Lord said unto him—Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me,*
to

CONTENTS. *xxiii*

to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. p. 57.

SERMON VI.

The Gospel a necessary Means of Salvation.

ROM. i. 16. I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ—for it is the power of God unto salvation. - - - p. 71.

SERMON VII.

The same Subject continued.

ROM. i. 18. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. - - - p. 85.

SERMON VIII.

Consequences of rejecting the Gospel.

ROM. i. 28. As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind. - - - p. 99.

xxiv CONTENTS.

S E R M O N IX.

Faith in Christ.

MATTH. viii. 2, 3. *Behold, there came a leper, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. — And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; — be thou clean.* p. 113.

S E R M O N X.

A good Christian superior to the World,

I JOHN v. 4. *This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,* p. 127.

S E R M O N XI.

Neglect of the Gospel Ingratitude to God.

JER. iii. 11. *Backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.* p. 139.

S E R M O N XII.

The Servitude of Sin.

GAL. iv. 7. *Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.* — p. 151.

C O N T E N T S. 11

S E R M O N XIII.

Our Interest in Heaven through Christ.

EPHES. ii. 4, 5, 6. God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. - p. 161.

S E R M O N XIV.

The conquering worldly Affections is being born of God.

I JOHN v. 4. Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world. - - p. 173.

S E R M O N XV.

On the Government of the Passions.

PROV. xxv. 28. He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls. - p. 187.

S E R M O N XVI.

The same Subject continued. p. 199.

S E R M O N

CONTENTS.

SERMON XVII.

The same Subject continued. p. 211.

SERMON XVIII.

The same Subject continued. p. 223.

SERMON XIX.

The Duty of Industry.

I THESS. iv. 10, 11, 12. *We beseech you, brethren, that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.* p. 233.

SERMON XX.

Agur's Prayer.

PROV. xxx. 8, 9. *Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:—lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

p. 247.

SERMON

SERMON

C O N T E N T S. xxvii

S E R M O N XXI.

The same Subject continued. p. 259.

S E R M O N XXII.

Forgetfulness of God in Prosperity.

LUKE xvi. 19. *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.* - p. 271.

S E R M O N XXIII.

Vain Professions of Religion.

MATT. xxi. 28, 29, 30, 31. *A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard; he answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise; and he answered and said, I go, sir, and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.* - p. 285.

S E R M O N

xxviii CONTENTS.

SERMON XXIV.

Fear of God.

TITUS ii. 11, 12, 13. *The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* - - p. 299.

SERMON XXV.

Religious Hope.

1 PETER i. 13. *Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end* p. 311.

SERMON XXVI.

Trust in God.

PSALM xxxvii. 3. *Put thou thy trust in the Lord, and be doing good.* - p. 325.

SERMON

CONTENTS. xxix

SERMON XXVII.

Love of God.

MATT. xxii. 37. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.* p. 337.

SERMON XXVIII.

God's Assistance in Discharge of our Duty.

MATT. xxv. 29. *Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away, even that which he hath.* p. 349.

SERMON XXIX.

Necessity of a Christian-like Behaviour.

MATT. xxii. 11, 12. *And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment? — And he was speechless.* p. 361.

SERMON

CONTENTS.

SERMON XXX.

Necessity and Efficacy of constant Prayer.

LUKE xi. 8. *I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.* - p. 373.

SERMON XXXI.

The same Subject continued. p. 385.

SERMON XXXII.

Humility.

ROM. xiii. 8. *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another.* - p. 399.

SERMON XXXIII.

Purity of Life.

ROM. xiii. 13. *Let us walk honestly, as in the day.* - p. 413.

SERMON

C O N T E N T S. xxxi

S E R M O N XXXIV.

The Advantage of Man's Redemption.

PSALM viii. 4. *Lord, what is man, that
thou art mindful of him?* - p. 425.

S E R M O N XXXV.

The Duty of setting a good Example.

I COR. x. 24. *Let no man seek his own, but
every man another's wealth.* - p. 439.

S E R M O N XXXVI.

The Duty of returning Good for Evil.

ROM. xii. 21. *Be not overcome of evil, but
overcome evil with good.* - - p. 451.

S E R M O N XXXVII.

The same Subject continued: p. 463.

S E R M O N

2 E. R. M. Q. N. XXIV.

The Advantages of a Good Education

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The Duty of setting a good example.

1. Cor. x. 24. The no. of the ...
- 9. 439.

СЕРМОНЪ

The Day of rearing Good for Evil.

Rosk. XII. 21. The first of the series of coils but
the second coil with good.

25 Я М О И . LXXXII.

The same subject continued. p. 469.

MEMORANDUM

S E R M O N I.

THE JEWISH DISPENSATION.

Exodus xix. 3, 4, 5, 6.

Moses went up unto God: and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying; Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob; and tell the children of Israel:—Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.—Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation.

GOD's purpose in the call of Abraham, and the revelations which he gave him, was, to separate a peculiar people for the preservation of true religion in the world, and the introduction of an universal blessing on mankind.

Vol. I. B kind.

kind. Accordingly God made a covenant with Abraham, consisting of two parts, the one of a temporal nature, containing a promise of the land of Canaan, the other of a spiritual nature, containing a purpose of the redemption of mankind to be wrought by Christ, who was to spring from the seed of Abraham; this latter part of the covenant is called in scripture God's *everlasting* covenant, to distinguish it from the other part, which was only temporary.

This covenant, consisting of these two parts, went down through the patriarchal age; and it is to be observed, that the patriarchs acted upon the mere hopes only which it suggested, for neither of its parts was accomplished in their time. As to the spiritual part, or the everlasting covenant, the accomplishment of that was plainly deferred to a very distant period of time; nor was even the temporal part executed in the days of the patriarchs. It concerned their posterity, and the object of it was the possession of a country, which at present was occupied by those who were not immediately to be turned out of it. Yet, upon these hopes the patriarchs behaved well and obediently; they were never corrupted with idolatry; and, having true notions of God's providence,

providence, and favoured as they were with a repetition of the promise which had been given to Abraham, their faith was steady, though the object of it lay far into futurity.

But when, afterwards, Abraham's posterity had been sojourners in Egypt for above two hundred years, God was then pleased to enter upon the execution of the temporal part of the covenant; the mere hopes of it, though sufficient to maintain the religion of a few good patriarchs and their families, would not continue to work the same effect upon a numerous nation, long tainted with idolatry, and disheartened by oppression. The Israelites during their bondage in Egypt did not lose the remembrance of the covenant God made with their fathers, but they lost that purity of worship and manners which became it. God therefore was pleased to supply them with fresh direction and support for their religion, and as there was a covenant subsisting, which contained under it the two promises of a temporal and of an everlasting blessing, God now thought fit to enter upon an actual execution of the former.

In the several conferences, which God had with Moses, from the time he called him in the burning bush to his appearance upon

Mount Sinai

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mount Sinai, we find no express mention of the everlasting covenant. It is true, God calls himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a title, which, no doubt, was assumed to remind Moses and the Israelites of every thing which God had promised to those patriarchs, and to encourage their hopes of having those promises fulfilled; and therefore, God's using this title may well be looked upon as a repetition of both parts of the covenant. But yet the peculiar business of God's revelations to Moses on mount Sinai, concerned not the spiritual, but the temporal part of the covenant, which was now going to be put in execution; and if from this time the attention of Providence seems wholly employed on this part of his purpose, we are not to conclude he has dropt the other; on the contrary, as the wisdom of God always acts with connection, and with a steady view to its proper end, we must conclude of every method he takes, that it contains what is relative and conducive to that end.

God's first revelations to Moses were suited to the present condition of the Israelites, and confined to the next immediate object of his purposes and their wants.

They were groaning under a severe state of
bondage,

bondage, and could hardly take comfort in the hopes of temporal blessings, till the miseries they then laboured under were removed. God therefore tells them no more for the present, than that he pitied their distress, that he would deliver them from it, and convinces them by miracles, that he had sent Moses to execute his purposes. Thus the first step in the execution of the temporal part of the covenant, was the deliverance of Israel from the hand of Pharaoh; and God gave them this natural assurance of placing them in their own land, by setting them free from a strange one.

As soon as God had delivered the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage, he calls them before him at mount Sinai. Here God takes up the temporal covenant made with their fathers, by which he promised them the land of Canaan, and treats with them upon that alone; and it is worth observing, what farther advance God made in his treaty with the Israelites upon this affair. God had made a covenant with Abraham, that his posterity should inherit the land of Canaan; in consequence of this single covenant, God might have placed them in the land of Canaan without any farther interposition; but, as if God

meant to bind the Israelites to him by every reason of trust and obligation, he made his former covenant with Abraham the foundation of a new one with them; and, as he entered into covenant with Abraham for establishing his promise, so he now enters into covenant with the Israelites for the execution of it.

The terms of this new covenant, which God now made with the Israelites, were, temporal blessings on God's part, and, on their part, obedience to the laws which God should give them.

The laws, which God gave the Israelites by Moses, were wise and excellent, what we may well pronounce of every work of God. The immediate design of them was to preserve the Israelites from idolatry and wickedness, and to maintain among them the knowledge and worship of the only true God, with the practice of true religion and righteousness. The moral precepts of the law of Moses are such as, if duly practised, could not fail of making that or any other nation happy. The fundamental principle, on which they are placed, is a full and convincing display of the unity, majesty, and perfection of God; and their tendency is to lead them

• them in the duties they owe to him and to one another, to worship and serve God, and him only, to love him with all the heart, and to fear his displeasure above all things, to put their trust in him, and submit themselves wholly to his will and commands, and to practise righteousness, justice, fidelity, temperance, mutual charity and benevolence one with another. Such precepts, if well observed, were sufficient, as Moses expresseth it, to “make them a wise and understanding people,” and of which he might well say—“What nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?” Dent. iv. 8.

As to the ritual precepts contained in the law of Moses, they were all significant and useful. Many of them were instituted to preserve them from idolatry, being such as were opposite to the idolatrous rites of the nations around them, and which, by the peculiar usages they contained, served to keep them a distinct people. There were many rites also, which as they gave an outward pomp and solemnity to their own true worship, made them less liable to be drawn aside by the splendid decorations of heathenish

worship. Other rites were appointed in commemoration of extraordinary acts of Providence towards their nation, by the observance of which they might keep up the love of God in their hearts, have their gratitude awakened, and their obedience preserved. And lastly, many of the rites in the law of Moses were appointed with a farther view to the spiritual promise, to which this execution of the temporal promise was an introduction, referring to the offices and benefits of the Messiah, of which they were types, or prophetic descriptions. But though many rites were appointed in the Mosaical law, yet it is to be observed, that the main stress is there laid on things of a moral nature, on the great essential duties of religion. All through that law the favour of God is promised to those who live in the practice of righteousness; and, on the other hand, the most awful threatenings are denounced against presumptuous transgressors. God's purity and holiness, his detestation against sin, and the terrors of his wrath, are there described in the most strong and significant expressions, which have a manifest tendency, where they are really believed, and seriously considered, to fill men with a sense of the malignity of sin, and to deter them from committing it.

Such

Such was the law, which, in this new covenant, God enjoined the Israelites. The blessing, which on God's part they were to expect from him for their observance of it, was indeed temporal, but containing under it every thing that is good and desirable in this world, health, peace, plenty, and victory over their enemies.—“Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field—blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep—blessed shall be thy basket and thy store—blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out—the Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face; and all people of the earth shall see, that thou art called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of thee.” Deut. xxviii.

Nor were these promises vain; read but their history and you will see, that the prosperity of the Israelites went an even pace with their obedience, as their disobedience was constantly chastised with adversity; and these temporal blessings, which were ready
for

for the present generation, if they deserved them, as they were of the same kind, so were they introductive of what was the main object of this covenant, the future possession of the land of Canaan.

And now let us stop and reflect on this remarkable event in the history of Providence. The apostle hath told us, that "these things" are written for our instruction and example, on whom the ends of the world are "come," that is, who live under the last religious dispensation of Providence; and in this event, where God, by the hand of Moses, delivers the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage, and enters into covenant with them for temporal blessings, and for bringing them into the land of Canaan, is delineated our own Christian situation, delivered as we are from the bondage of sin, by Jesus Christ, and admitted into covenant with God for his present favour, and for obtaining the kingdom of heaven. Such similitudes as these between some remarkable events in the Old Testament, and what is set forth to us in the New, confirm this general observation, that Providence had one uniform view under the old and new dispensation, that there is an agreement or dependency between them,

them, and that the religion of Jesus Christ was but the accomplishment of what, for ages before, the wisdom of God had appointed to be done. In the event before us we are taught, by the apostle St. Paul, to apply the passage of the Israelites through the Red sea to our Christian baptism, and the church has adopted his interpretation in the office which is used on that occasion; after which there needs no force in applying the situation of the Israelites in Egypt to our own state under sin, and their situation at mount Sinai, and afterwards, to our own state under the gospel, in covenant with God for his favour here, and our happiness hereafter, if we obey the laws which he hath given us by Jesus Christ.

In this practical view of the event, we cannot but be sensible, how greatly we stand indebted to the goodness of God, and how much we are concerned to behave suitably to our deliverance. We feel a sort of indignation against the Israelites, whilst we read their history, when we find how soon after their deliverance they rebelled against God, and provoked Moses, his servant, and their deliverer.—Even at the foot of mount Sinai, whilst God was yet speaking to
Moses,

Moses, and whilst they were yet remembering the extraordinary manner in which they had been brought out of Egypt, they revolted to the idolatry they had learned there, and would "make themselves Gods to go before them."

—Daring ingratitude this in the Israelites!—Yet not more so than our own; when, after our admission into the Christian covenant, whilst we are scarce returned from the font of baptism, we employ our early years in a pursuit after the sins we have so solemnly renounced, and, under the fullest light of religious instruction, despise God and his son Christ Jesus, and set up leaders of our own to go before us.—And, however we may blame the stupidity of the Israelites in being so attached to a place, wherein they had so severely smarted under servitude, it is but too like our own; when with reluctance we forsake the sins we have actually groaned under, and are easily led to pay homage to the folly we have relinquished. The slavery men feel under a wicked course of life is greater than that which the Israelites felt under Pharaoh; and yet, when a reformation has taken place, and, like the Israelites, they are escaped over to the mount of God, how apt are they, like them, to fall into a repetition

tion of their old sins, and to be impatient under the delivery of the precepts, which Christ's religion sets before them!

The laws which God gave the Israelites, as has been observed, were excellent, and though the due observance of them would naturally tend to make them a happy people, yet God was pleased to enter into covenant with them for their obedience, by the promise of great and many blessings in return. The same moral laws are contained in our Christian covenant, with the same natural effect on our present state, and with much greater blessings in futurity, to encourage our obedience; for God covenanted with the Israelites only for the temporal blessings of this life, with the prospect of an earthly Canaan, but he covenants with Christians for the spiritual, as well as temporal blessings of this life, and with the prospect of an heavenly Canaan in the next.

A prospect we should be constantly viewing, and contemplating; and when we reflect on what God hath done in setting it before us—how much greater wonders he hath wrought in redeeming us from the bondage of sin by Jesus Christ, than were per-
formed

formed in delivering the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage by the hand of Moses, let us eagerly set forward to the liberty, to the righteousness, to the happiness he points out for us. And if at any time we have renounced our former sins and follies, and the grace of God has borne us from our former slavery, as on eagles' wings, and brought us to himself, let us strictly attend to the covenant he makes with us, to the promise he hath given us, and to the precepts he hath set before us—let us be careful not to start from our good purposes, and, having once escaped the burdens and the scourges of sin, let us be fearful of resuming even its entertainments; let us not, like the Israelites, set up our golden calves to worship and dance around them, and intemperately say of Christ, as they did of Moses—"we wist not what is become of him;"—but, patiently waiting on the command of God, and fixing our attention on our heavenly leader, let us follow him, without interruption, through the duties, which he hath set us in this life, to the happiness, which he hath provided for us in the next.

SERMON

[155]
SERMON II.

The same Subject continued.

Exodus xiii. 5, 6.

If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be to me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation.

IN my last discourse I observed, that the covenant God made with the Israelites, by Moses, at mount Sinai, was founded on temporal blessings;—that it was an opening into the execution of the temporal part of that covenant which God had made with Abraham, the hopes arising from which covenant, in both its parts (the temporal, which pointed at the land of Canaan, and the spiritual, which pointed at the universal blessing) had been conveyed all through the patriarchal age, and was the support of their religion.

When

When thus, at mount Sinai, God entered on the execution of the temporal part of the covenant he made with Abraham, what, think we, was become of the spiritual part? —It must be still subsisting — for God's promises are sure; and this had not yet been accomplished. The law, which God gave the Israelites by Moses, the covenant he then made with them, did neither set it aside, nor accomplish it. It did not set it aside—for there is no reason, as the apostle says, that a covenant with a particular people for temporal blessings, succeeding a general one for spiritual blessings, should disannul it, because they may subsist together. And as the covenant made at mount Sinai did not set aside, so neither did it accomplish, the spiritual part of the covenant with Abraham, which contained a blessing to all nations; —but how was the particular œconomy of the Israelites a blessing to all nations, when all other nations were expressly excluded from it?

The spiritual blessing, it is true, was not properly a part of the Mosaic covenant; yet it must be contained under it—for this reason, that as the Mosaic covenant tended to the execution of the temporal part
of

of the promise given to Abraham, so it naturally tended to maintain the hopes arising from the spiritual part of it; for where a promise consists of two parts, the accomplishment of one part is a natural assurance of the accomplishment of the other.—This therefore may well lead us to conclude, that as the spiritual part of the Abrahamic covenant must be still subsisting, when the law of Moses was given, so the Israelites had not lost their notion of it, or their hopes arising from it.

There is no room to doubt, but the Israelites brought with them the faith of their ancestors out of Egypt. They had lost, indeed, the purity of their worship and manners, but they had not lost their faith—which was their religion; and which must be distinguished from the law given them in the covenant made at mount Sinai, which was not intended to introduce a religion, which they had not before, but to preserve that which they already had. It is true, the covenant introduced a new form of worship, and external ceremonies; but it did not introduce a new faith, which was truly and properly their religion; our notion of which should not

VOL. I. C be

be confined to the three parts of the Mosaic law, namely, the moral, the ceremonial, and the political precepts contained in it:—the religion of the Israelites was all this, but it was something more;—had their first acquaintance with God been at mount Sinai, had they known nothing of his conduct and purposes before, this had been all their religion; but they were sensible of God's former purposes and promises; and it is the religion of those to whom God hath given his promises, to have faith in them. This faith, this religion of the Israelites, is distinguishable from the covenant God made with them on mount Sinai; upon which distinction it will appear, that the hopes of God's universal blessing were previous to this covenant, and must be subsisting under it; and though not a part of the covenant, was the substance of their religion.

Perhaps we may not find, in the history of the Israelites under the law of Moses, so much direct proof of their having these hopes as we might expect; but we are to remember, that the history we have of God's revelations is more intended to shew us what God hath done, than to shew us what notions

tions men had of it. The scriptures contain an account of facts, but not an account of opinions, any farther than they are deducible from facts; so that if the scriptures gave us no express information of the spiritual hopes which the Israelites entertained under the Mosaic covenant, it would not be a proof that they entertained none. But if the Old Testament, which is purely an historical account of facts, does not sufficiently inform us upon this point, yet the New Testament, in which men, divinely inspired, reasoned from the Old, will shew us what we look for. We have there full proof to shew us, of what nature the faith of the Israelites was. St. Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, expressly asserts, that not only in the patriarchal age down to Moses, but even under the law of Moses, men acted upon the hopes of better things than they found from the temporal covenant. And it is an apostolic argument, applied to explain Christianity, that the object of religious faith has been always the same from Abraham, — namely, God's promise, whilst it was a promise, and his accomplishment, when it became so, of a salvation to mankind through the seed of Abraham;

ham;—with this difference, that the nearer the times drew to the actual coming of this seed, the more clearly they saw it, and after it was come, the religious faith of men looked backward, as, before it came it looked forward, to the accomplishment which was in Christ.

It is natural to suppose, that the Israelites might be less attentive to the spiritual part of the Abrahamic covenant, than the patriarchs of old were: Temporal blessings, especially when we begin to taste them, though less valuable than spiritual blessings, strike the attention more forcibly; and the prospect of the land of Canaan, under what the Israelites already experienced, was doubtless a more striking object in the hopes of the Israelites than what lay beyond it.

God revealed himself to the patriarchs with respect to both parts of the Abrahamic covenant; and the patriarchs distinguished them; for they transmitted them down distinguished, from one to another. But the patriarchs had not such a dispensation of temporal blessings, as might fix their attention upon one part of the promise, and lead them to neglect the other; they had only hopes to encourage them; and if they did not fix their hopes wholly upon the better part
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of the promise, they certainly did not forget it.

It was otherwise with the Israelites. God treated with them upon the temporal covenant only; and in this treaty no express mention was made of the spiritual or everlasting covenant. They were immediately made to feel the actual enjoyment of temporal blessings; and this might principally direct their attention to one part only of the Abrahamic covenant, when it really lay before them in both its parts. They might be careless in observing what was not expressed to them, and might be more influenced by what they felt or hoped for themselves, than by what they only hoped for others: — thus they might look upon the land of Canaan as the principal object of God's intentions, and upon themselves as the principal objects of his care; mistaking that for the end of his dispensation which was only the means or introduction towards it.

Yet, though the Israelites, under the law of Moses, might have less attention to the spiritual part of the Abrahamic covenant, than the patriarchs had, there was still an advance in the dispensation of God, as he was

now opening the temporal part of that covenant more fully than he had done before. God had opened the spiritual part of it to the patriarchs so far as was sufficient for supporting the religion of those times; and now finding some other steps necessary to be taken, he proceeds to open and establish the temporal part; and, for a while, leaves the hopes arising from the spiritual part to subsist upon, what was no bad foundation for it, the traditions delivered down from the patriarchs, to whom they were revealed:—it was from this source, and not from the covenant at mount Sinai, that the Israelites derived their spiritual hopes. But though they did not derive them from that covenant, yet that covenant helped to support them; because, having both the temporal and spiritual part of the Abrahamic covenant before them, their seeing one accomplished was a natural assurance for the accomplishment of the other.

We are not then to wonder, if we do not find the doctrine of the soul's immortality, and a future state, expressly set forth in the terms of the Mosaic covenant, or in the history that is given of that covenant. There wanted not a fresh revelation of what God had from the beginning made known to man;

man; of a doctrine, which must always have lain at the bottom of true religion, and on which was built a considerable part even of the idolatry which then overspread the world; a doctrine which if it afterwards stood in need of the more express revelation of Christ's gospel, it was not owing to its being unknown, but because, under the operations of vain philosophy, the pride of some, who would be wise above the vulgar, either prompted them to deny it, or led them to puzzle a plain and antient truth with their learned and dark conceits.

But though the doctrine of a future state was not taken into the terms of the Mo-
saic covenant, yet it was implied under it; and the temporal blessings and threatenings, which were a suitable sanction of a law given to a temporal community, did not exclude the rewards and punishments of a future state, a belief of which was derived to them from the antient patriarchs, and had obtained among them as well as among all nations from the beginning.

Upon this footing then stood the religion and the government of the Israelites;—their religion, properly so called, was founded on the revelations God had made to the

patriarchs, at different times, superadded to the dictates of natural reason;—their government was founded on the covenant God made with them by Moses at mount Sinai.

In the administration of which government God himself presided over them in a peculiar and extraordinary manner, for the preservation of true religion and righteousness among them, and to give them a sense and conviction of his governing providence; a right notion of which the nations around them had well nigh lost under their idolatrous practices; whereby they were led to expect the blessings or calamities of life from inferior deities, and consequently to invest them with the administration and government of human affairs. But the Israelites, in their situation, could not well fall into this pernicious mistake; the acts of God's providence among them, his judgments and mercies, were so signal and so frequent, that they must have afforded them a constant proof of his government over them, and were at least fitted for leading them to acknowledge the hand of God in every thing that befel them. — True it is, that, notwithstanding this strong guard to keep them from idolatry,

idolatry, they frequently fell into it; but it is observable, that they never did so, but at the same time they fell into mischiefs proportionable to the heinous guilt of rebelling against such strong convictions of duty as they had before them.

God's extraordinary government of the Israelites, by which he made them his own peculiar people, was no partial conduct in him as governor of the world, — for this plain and obvious reason — that the end, which God proposed by his particular treatment of the Israelites, was the general good of all mankind.

III. With respect to the preservation of true religion, which had otherwise been lost in the world, but which was kept alive by the peculiar separation of the Israelites, — In this the conduct of God was general, though the means he applied was particular; for true religion, thus preserved among the Israelites, diffused itself afterwards over all the world. In reading the history of this people we cannot avoid observing, how instrumental they were in propagating the knowledge of the true God among mankind. Situate as they were in the midst of the most remarkable countries of the earth, they

they were constantly observed by other nations; the wonderful steps they took to the establishment of their kingdom, attended with such signal acts of Providence, served to spread the glory and majesty of God around them; the figure they made after their kingdom was established did no less so; and even their captivities and dispersions served towards spreading the knowledge of true religion in the countries where they were scattered.— If we may be allowed to illustrate the conduct of Providence by our weak and low similitudes, it may be said, that God's conduct in preserving true religion among the Israelites, when it was well nigh lost in the world, and then making them his instruments in spreading it among mankind, is like setting up a single flame from a dying fire, which is afterwards to be rekindled by it.

2. Another very important end, which God proposed in the separation of the Israelites, and which sufficiently shews, that he had the general good of mankind in view, was, that this particular polity was subservient to his great design of sending his Son to redeem mankind, and of accomplishing the promise he had given to Abraham of raising up an universal blessing by
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one among his posterity. God from the beginning advanced gradually in the revelation of this important person; promising, at first, that he should be one of the race of mankind — “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head;” — then, in his revelation to Abraham, confining this general promise to one particular nation among mankind — “In thy seed shall all families of the earth be blessed;” — and next confining it to one particular tribe of that nation, when, by the Divine Spirit, the patriarch Jacob said of Judah his son — “Thou art He whom thy brethren shall praise — the scepter shall not depart from Judah, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be;” — and lastly, this promise was confined to one particular family of that tribe, and the house of David was appointed to bring forth the promised seed; — and there the promise rested, till it was accomplished in Christ.

During the course of which gradual advance in divine revelation, God was pleased so to order it, that many of the laws and rites in the Mosaic œconomy had reference to Christ, as well as several remarkable transactions and events

events in the history of the Israelites. Besides which, God raised up a succession of prophets among them, who described the person who was to come by his most remarkable characters, foretold the blessings of his kingdom, and plainly pointed out the time and place of his birth, and principal circumstances of his appearance.—These appointments served to give the Israelites an expectation of the Messiah, which spread itself among the nations of the world, and prepared them for the reception of him.—And, as they served to raise an expectation of the Messiah before he came, so, when added to the attestations he gave of himself at his coming, they contributed to make the evidence of his divine mission compleat and satisfactory.

SERMON

SERMON III.

THE PROMISE OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION TO DAVID.

2 SAM. vii. 12, 13, 14.

I will set up thy seed after thee, and I will establish his kingdom; he shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.—I will be his father, and he shall be my son.

WHEN king David had obtained rest from all his enemies around him, and he sat in his house in full peace and splendor, it occurred to him to do honour to God, to whose goodness and power he owed his present happy situation. His piety suggested to him, that he dwelt more magnificently than God. See now (he says to the prophet Nathan), "I dwell in a house of cedar; but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." He therefore

therefore “vowed a vow unto the almighty
 “God of Jacob—I will not come within
 “the tabernacle of my house, or climb up
 “into my bed—until I find out a place for the
 “temple of the Lord.” God accepted his
 pious intention, but withheld him from the
 execution of it. Instead of David’s building
 a house for God, God promises that he will
 make David a house, that is, will raise him
 up a seed that shall reign for many genera-
 tions. I will set up, &c.

St. Paul applies this prophecy to Christ;
 for, speaking of Christ’s dignity above the
 angels, he asks—“Unto which of the angels
 “said God at any time, I will be to him a
 “father, and he shall be to me a son?”
 This implies that God hath said thus much
 of Christ; which must therefore be in this
 passage, because the words occur no where
 else in scripture. There is no doubt but this
 prophecy points at Solomon. David him-
 self hath sufficiently determined this, in his
 address to Solomon—“My son, as for me,
 “it was in my mind to build an house unto
 “the name of the Lord my God; but the
 “word of the Lord came unto me, saying—
 “Thou hast shed blood abundantly—thou
 “shalt not build an house unto my name.—
 “Behold,

" Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who
 " shall be a man of rest—his name shall be
 " Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet-
 " ness unto Israel in his days.—He shall
 " build an house for my name, and He shall
 " be my son, and I will be his father, and
 " I will establish the throne of his kingdom
 " for ever." 1 Chron. xxii.—This shews
 that the prophecy before us points at Solo-
 mon; but then St. Paul's application of it
 shews, that, besides pointing at Solomon, it
 points at Christ also, in whom it received its
 full completion. It was indeed the common
 doctrine of the Jewish church, that Christ
 was typified under Solomon in the promise
 given to David of an everlasting kingdom,
 and that the things spoken of Solomon were
 chiefly and literally true of the Messiah.

And it is an observation which every Chris-
 tian reader can easily make, how accurately
 Christ fulfilled this emblem of him, which
 was set forth in the person and transactions
 of Solomon, whose name signifies peace,
 and in whose days Israel should have peace
 from their enemies. This was verified under
 the temporal reign of Solomon, but was to be
 more eminently verified under the spiritual
 reign of Christ; whose birth was attended

with a heavenly proclamation of peace; who is called in scripture the prince of peace; and in the general progress of whose gospel through the world, as well as in the particular establishment of it in each Christian breast, sin and the terrors of it are defeated, and peace prevails—spiritual peace of mind, and eternal peace with God, through his blessed atonement and mediation.

The prophecy, which has the seed of David for its immediate object, further says—
 “ I will ordain a place for my people Israel,
 “ and will plant them, and they shall dwell
 “ in their place, and shall be moved no
 “ more, neither shall the children of wicked-
 “ ness waste them any more.” 1 Chron.
 xvii. 9.—This was in part verified in the days of Solomon, with respect to the Canaanites; but when we consider their subsequent captivities under the kings of Assyria and Babylon, their destruction by the Romans, and that even now they are no more a nation, we cannot think the prophecy compleatly fulfilled, which says—“ they shall be moved no
 “ more, neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more.” But this promise suits exactly with the descriptions, which the following prophets give of the
 state

state of God's people under the Messiah in future times, and therefore may well be explained by them; and we may conclude, that Christ is here pointed out by a circumstance, which, if it be not entirely confined to him, is however most eminently accomplished in him.—And as to the great work of Solomon in building a temple to God, how eminently this was answered, and at the same time exceeded, by the great work of Christ in setting up his church, is too obvious to need enlarging upon. This work of Christ was indeed fitly prefigured by building a most glorious temple with the most precious materials; but it as much exceeded the work of Solomon, as the souls of men exceed wood and stone, or as eternity exceeds any portion of temporary duration.

If we follow David in his prophecies, we shall be still more convinced of their extensive reach, and find, that although Solomon was the first, he was not the only, or the principal object of them.

Towards the conclusion of David's life, when he set Solomon on his throne, and had the satisfaction to see all the great men of his kingdom acknowledge him for their succeeding sovereign before he died, transported with an

extraordinary joy on this occasion he composed the seventy-second psalm. Wherein, under the form of a prayer for the prosperous state of Solomon's kingdom, he prophesies the happiness, justice, power, extent, and duration of the kingdom of Christ. For so high is the strain, that the reign of Solomon affords but a partial accomplishment of it, and we have no where to look for a full one, but under the kingdom of Christ.

The descriptions it contains are too high to be fully accomplished by the temporal reign of one, who although he is recorded to have been the wisest of kings, yet had some great blemishes in his conduct. His righteousness, it seems, so far from "flourishing as long as the sun and moon endureth," did not hold up through the period of his reign; the glory of which was grievously sullied at the conclusion of it by his falling into idolatry—and He, who had built a temple to God, was afterwards foolishly prevailed upon to build a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. This heinous revolt of Solomon shewed him to have been as frail as he was wise, as it arose from a weakness, which,

however it may be found in the folly of man, belongs not to Him who is the subject of this psalm, to whom, as the beginning of it sets forth, was given the judgments and righteousness of God.

The extent of kingdom, represented in this psalm, seems too great for the extent of Solomon's kingdom, which was not a very great one, and, in comparison with the empires which God afterwards set up, was in truth a very small one. The whole land of Judea, with its neighbourhood, was but a part, and no very considerable one, of the Persian, or of the Roman empire—and the promise, here given, that "all kings should fall down before him, and all nations do him service," seems but very imperfectly fulfilled in the homage which Solomon received from a few petty princes around him, or in the visit which the queen of Sheba made him.—Every one sees how much more accurately it suits with the extent of Christ's kingdom, and the progress of his gospel, which has made its way into all countries of the earth, and shall in time fully possess them all, "as the waters cover the sea." Christ's kingdom and the righteousness of it is truly as the sun—as lasting as the sun, as diffusive

in its power, reaching from east to west, and bringing all nations and kings under its dominion—the kingdom, which the prophet Daniel has described as “a stone, which, “breaking all other kingdoms to pieces, it- “self became a great mountain, and filled “the whole earth”—the kingdom of the “Son of man” (as he describes it in another of his visions) “to whom was given dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all “people, nations, and languages should serve “him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom, that which shall “not be destroyed.” Chap. vii. 14.

But the most remarkable passage in the psalm before us, and which evidently looks beyond Solomon upon Christ, is towards the conclusion of it; and as this, probably, is the last psalm which David composed, may be considered almost as his last words.—

“His name shall endure for ever—His name “shall be continued as long as the sun—and “men shall be blessed in Him, all nations “shall call him blessed.”

Here we have the very original promise given to Abraham repeated and applied. God said to Abraham—“In thy seed shall “all nations of the earth be blessed.”

David

David here says—"All men shall be blessed in him," in that son of whom he is prophesying.—But was Solomon that son? Solomon was a happy king, and his own people enjoyed a happy reign under him; but what were other people the better for that? or, how were "all men," "all nations upon earth," blessed in Solomon? Or when have all nations called Solomon blessed?—There is therefore no doubt, but as this part of the prophecy is the same with the promise originally given to Abraham, it must have the same person for its subject, and must be understood, not of Solomon, but of Christ.

It appears then, that, however David's paternal spirit might at first move him to pray for his son Solomon's good and happy reign, yet, when the divine prophetic spirit joined its powerful influence, it carried him, as it must needs, to objects far beyond, and far more important. For the Spirit of God seldom interposes in matters merely personal, and at hand, with which no future designs of his providence are connected. And from what we read of God's conduct in communicating the gift

of prophecy to men, we may conclude, that when God was pleased to fill the breast of his prophet David with his divine Spirit, so important a gift was communicated for a purpose equally important; not merely and solely to foretell what was just at hand in Solomon's reign, but to point at what was greater and lay farther into futurity—in short, not merely to foretell what Solomon would do, but also what God himself had purposed to do.

Such observations as these upon the prophecies of David, to shew that they point at Christ, are intelligible enough to us at this time, who look back to them from their accomplishment, and can compare what we read with what we see. But here a question arises, a very natural one,—Whether the people of those times did then understand these prophecies as they are now explained; or, how much they might or did understand from them?

Doubtless they did not understand them as they are now explained—for it is the general nature of prophecy to be obscure, more or less, at its delivery, and then only clear, when it is accomplished; for its principal

principal use is the conviction of future generations, more than the information of the present—and time, which is apt to destroy other writings, ripens prophecy. So that, on this account at least, succeeding generations grow wiser than those that have gone before—not by any accession of improvement in the faculties of the human understanding, but by the accession of events, which illustrate and explain what has been prophesied.

With respect to Christian prophecy in particular, many good reasons may be assigned, why it should not be as explicit in the delivery of it, as it is accurate in the accomplishment. Considering the agency of man, to say nothing of the agency of evil Beings above him, it may be a suitable step in the wise conduct of Providence, to deliver his purposes in such a manner, that the obscurity of them may prevent some from being in too much haste to accomplish them, and others from being busy in defeating them. Considering too the condition of man, as a religious dependent creature, it is more suitable he should be directed by hope gradually improving upon him,

him, than be at once filled with compleat knowledge. And, notwithstanding the obscurity attending any sacred prophecy at its delivery, if it has but light enough to shew a ground to set hope and faith upon, it will be sufficient to justify this method of God's revelations.

With respect to the revelation which God gave of Christ by his prophet David—it was general and obscure; so was the original promise of a Redeemer given to Adam: and as that was at first sufficient for the religious hope of those to whom it was given, and, in the course of prophecy, gradually opened itself, till it discovered that a son of David should be that Redemer; so now, the promise of that son, though general and obscure, was sufficient for the religious hope of those times; and it might well be left to the future course of prophecy to discover, that this son of David should be Christ.

The age in which this prophecy was given saw, that a son of David was designed in it, which the succeeding age soon saw was not fully accomplished in Solomon; from whence religious minds would naturally
derive

derive hopes of some future blessing to be derived to them, in a more full and exact completion of it. If they saw thus much, they saw enough;—as much as was sufficient, according to God's usual method of revelation, and as much as was sufficient, whereon to build their religious faith and obedience to God.

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ons

41
Sermon by Wm. L. Garrison to the
disadvantage of those whose blessing to be
denied to them, in a more full and exact
extension of it. If they saw this much
they saw enough, as much as was
enough, according to God's usual method of
revelation, and as much as was sufficient
whereon to build their religious faith and
obedience to God.

SERMON

S E R M O N IV.

The same Subject continued.

2 S A M. vii. 12, 13.

I will set up thy seed after thee—and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

IT is natural to suppose, that the divine promise of an everlasting kingdom under a son of David, was not at first understood in that spiritual sense, in which the Christian accomplishment of it shews it was meant. It is natural to suppose, that the Israelites were led by it to expect the grandeur and strength of a temporal kingdom—that the successors of David should possess his throne in security and splendor, till some one among them should at length arise, who should extend his empire over all the heathen world,

But

But how soon were such expectations discouraged! when in the beginning of the very next reign, of Rehoboam the son of Solomon, ten tribes of the twelve revolted from the house of David, and, under the conduct of Jeroboam, set up the separate kingdom of Israel in opposition to Judah, which with the tribe of Benjamin remained with Rehoboam.

At sight of this event the Israelites might have cried out—"Lord, where are thy loving-kindnesses which," but now, "thou hast sworn unto David?"—had it not been, that God was pleased to give a warning of this event, with a fresh assurance of his promise made to David.

God was angry with Solomon for his idolatrous behaviour and disobedience in the latter part of his reign; therefore he thus rent the kingdom from him; agreeable to a message, which he sent to Jeroboam by a prophet, before Solomon died; when the prophet represented God's purpose to him by rending Jeroboam's garment into twelve pieces and giving him ten of them. And, because God would not alter the purposes of his covenant with David, or totally discourage

discourage his people's faith in them, the prophet was at the same time commissioned to declare—that “ God would not rend away
“ all the kingdom from Solomon, but would
“ give one tribe to his son Rehoboam, for
“ David his servant's sake—that David, faith
“ God, may have a light always before me
“ in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen
“ me to put my name there.” 1 Kings
xi. 36.

Upon this promise then the Israelites of the tribe of Judah might set out afresh with their expectations of a kingdom to be continued in the house of David, till in future time it should be raised to that splendor and glory, which is described in many places in the Psalms. But future times produced events quite the reverse of such expectations; when, instead of splendor and universal dominion, this mistaken people found themselves plunged in captivity and destruction, first by the king of Assyria, and then by the king of Babylon. It was not naturally to be expected, that, under such events, so opposite to the interpretation they had made of God's promises, they should be strong enough to maintain a steady faith in them: God well knew the
weight

weight of the dispensations he was preparing, and their weakness in sustaining them, and therefore provided accordingly; and, as the season for these events approached, the divine spirit of prophecy broke out with stronger and more frequent energy, than it ever did before, to warn them of what was coming, and to assure them of God's fidelity in making good his promises, however he found it necessary to chastise their frequent disobedience; which chastisements, at the same time that they punished their sins, promoted God's purposes in preparing the way for the Messiah.

Jeroboam, at the head of the ten revolted tribes, to support his kingdom of Israel, had recourse to idolatry. He was just returned from Egypt, whither he had fled for security during the reign of Solomon, who relished not his appointment to ten parts of the kingdom, and sought his death. Jeroboam returned from Egypt initiated into the rites of idolatry. In imitation of the Egyptian idols, he set up two golden calves for the public worship of the people,—“Behold thy
“Gods, O Israel, which brought thee up
“out of Egypt!—He set one in Dan and
“the

"the altar in Bethel," the two extremes of his kingdom.

There was, it seems, state policy in this, as well as idolatry; for we are told, Jeroboam was apprehensive, lest the frequent visits of his subjects to worship at Jerusalem might tempt them to return to Rehoboam. But this, like all other state tricks that are opposite to religion, was bad policy. The separation of the two kingdoms was from the Lord; and Jeroboam should have left God to support his own appointments; especially after God had promised to be with him if he would walk in his ways. "It shall be," said God to him by his prophet, "if thou wilt walk in my ways, and do that which is right in my sight—that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee." 1 Kings xi. 38. — But Jeroboam, instead of walking in God's ways, must needs take his own; and, instead of obeying God, dishonoured him by setting up idolatry.

In consequence of this institution, Jeroboam "turned out the priests and levites from their possessions;" — consistently enough,

enough, for those who have no regard for God can have none for his priests; they therefore gladly quitted their possessions and went over to Rehoboam, leaving Jeroboam, as the history tells us, to “ordain him priests of his own (from the lowest of the people) for the devils and for the calves which he had made.”

This idolatry, on which Jeroboam thought to secure his kingdom, was the cause of its destruction; it continued through the whole line of his successors, and carried a curse along with it. For God told Jeroboam — “I will smite Israel as a reed is shaken in the water, and I will root up Israel out of this good land, which I gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the river.” 1 Kings xiv. 15. — The kings of Israel were, as they needs must be, as wicked as they were idolatrous; though there were near twenty of them in the line of succession, yet only two of them, Jehoram and Jehu, are noted for having done some good. — The kingdom of Judah seems to have been not much better, for, out of the same number of kings, *that* afforded but six religious ones — all the rest were idolaters.

This

This division of the two kingdoms, with the idolatry that infected them both, was the cause of most of the evils which beset them. Almost their whole history is taken up with the wars they had with each other, and with the neighbouring states; so that in vain shall we look here for the completion of the promises which God made to David. One circumstance, however, is remarkable, which shows that God was still intent upon those promises,—which is, that, whereas many of the kings of Israel came to the throne by violence, and not by rightful succession, the kings of Judah, on the other hand, being the posterity of David, all reigned by right of inheritance, each king succeeding his father in the throne, according to God's promise to David, that he would set up his seed after him.

But what is most remarkable in the state of these kingdoms, during this period, is God's care for this ungrateful and rebellious people, in sending his prophets among them for their instruction and direction. In every king's reign, from first to last, there was one or more prophets to admonish and correct them; but in the reign of Ahab king of Israel, (about sixty years after Solomon) we find a

very extraordinary prophet sent to reprove him for his enormities, the prophet Elijah; whose original is unknown, and his conclusion wonderful; for, after having discharged the business on which he was sent, which was to reprove Ahab, and to bear God's vindication of his own honour against the idolatry of the times, he was taken up alive into heaven.

Such a message from God, so circumstanced, was as wonderful as the obstinacy of the people who were not reformed by it. Afterwards, in the reign of Uzziah king of Judah, and of Jeroboam the second, king of Israel (one hundred and eighty-nine years after Solomon, and sixty-five before the captivity of the ten tribes), when both kingdoms seem to have reached the summit of their glory, and from which time they both gradually declined, God began to pour forth the spirit of prophecy more plentifully among them. Then did those prophets appear, whose writings are recorded in scripture; most of whom prophesied before the two captivities of Israel and of Judah; two of them (Ezekiel and Daniel), prophesied under the Babylonish captivity; and three of them (Haggai, Zechariah,

chariah, and Malachi) prophesied after the Babylonish captivity.

The time was now approaching when God was ready, through the particular dispensation over his people Israel, to open somewhat more largely his general purpose of sending the Messiah, and through the punishment of one nation to open a way for the salvation of mankind. — Hitherto (to make use of God's own expressive similitude), “ the house of
“ Israel had been the vineyard of the Lord of
“ Hosts, and the men of Judah his pleasant
“ plant.” This vineyard, situate on the fruitful hill of Sion, God had fenced, and planted it with the choicest vines, the knowledge of true religion, and his gracious oracles of salvation; “ and now, after
“ he had looked it should bring forth grapes,
“ and it brought forth wild grapes,” — disobedience, and rebellion, — God determined what to do with his vineyard: — “ I will take
“ away the hedge thereof, and it shall be
“ eaten up, and break down the wall thereof,
“ and it shall be trodden down.”

God had his ministers ready to execute this purpose, the kings of Assyria and of Babylon; the former, in three several attacks upon the

country, at length carried away the ten tribes, which made up the kingdom of Israel, and planting them in Assyria, in the cities of the Medes, sent other people, the subjects of Assyria, in exchange, to take possession of Samaria, and the adjacent country, which the Israelites had left, and which had been the seats of Ephraim and Manasseh.

When God was thus ready to take away these ten tribes, and to turn out so considerable a part of Abraham's posterity from the land he had promised them, it was necessary to open his revelations a little more fully; if for no other reason, at least for this very good one, namely, to support the faith of the remaining tribes, and the house of Judah, who else might well be disheartened by such an event, which might make them wonder, and cry out—"Lord, where are thy old loving-kindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth?"

But there was another reason for it, which was—that the Israelites being now sent out from their enclosure into the world, it was suitable they should go with sufficient instructions to prepare the world for the purposes God had in view. For we shall judge very imperfectly
both

Both of this and the succeeding deportation of the Israelites; if we think Providence intended this step only for their punishment, and not for the much more important effect arising from it in spreading the knowledge of God and his revelations among mankind.

Accordingly, the prophecies, which immediately preceded this event, were now more plainly directed to the great object God had in view, for accomplishing the promise he had made to David; and we find, in the writings of the prophets, that they were employed, not only in reproofing the Israelites for their disobedience, and foretelling their approaching calamities, but also in directing their hopes to the coming of the Messiah.

These were the main points in the prophecies delivered at this time to the people of Israel and of Judah. Their behaviour had been such as justly merited the divine reproof, and the calamities which were prepared for them. God's goodness towards them, on the other hand, was such, that he would warn them of their approaching punishment, that they might have opportunity for repentance, and avoid it. Beyond this God's mercy

had still a farther object in view, which was the recovery of them by his future dispensations, of which he gave them so much hope as was sufficient, but not that knowledge which would have been improper. In short, and in truth, the general design of the prophecies given to the Israelites at this time was—to make them sensible of their sins—to shew them their punishment—and to point at the Messiah as their recovery.

How uniform are the operations of Divine Providence! and how aptly do these early sketches of Christian salvation correspond with the future completion of it! What the prophets then foretold to the Israelites, the gospel has shewed to us—our sin, and our danger;—only, what the prophets obscurely hinted to them, the gospel of Christ has fully demonstrated to us—our recovery and restoration through Christ.

May we live like those who are fully instructed!—like those who have received the last instruction which God will vouchsafe!—Let us consider the advantage we enjoy above the Israelites, and estimate our own fate by theirs. They neglected the admonition of their prophets, who only
shewed

shewed them Christ at a great distance— they went into captivity; but were, or will be, recalled: — but how shall we escape, or, whither shall we be carried, if we neglect what hath been set before us? — who have had Christ personally among us, to work out our salvation, and who, by his Spirit, is constantly with us to conduct us in our way to it.

...the Lord Jesus Christ at a great distance
they went into captivity; but were, as well
be recalled: — but how shall we escape
without that we be turned, in our hearts
what hath been for before us? — who have
had Christ personally among us to work out
our salvation, and who, by his Spirit, is con-
stantly with us to comfort us in our way

SERMON V.

THE MISSION OF ST. PAUL TO THE
GENTILES.

ACTS ix. 15,

The Lord said unto him—Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel,

THE time was come that the gospel of salvation should be preached to the Gentiles. God, in his eternal counsel from the beginning, had purposed it for all mankind; and what had hitherto been preparing, under the several revelations in the Jewish religion, was now to be laid open to the whole world; and salvation through Christ, as it was intended for all mankind, was now to be universally proposed. The partition, which hitherto had separated the Jews from the rest of mankind, was to be thrown down, and

the Gentiles, without paying any regard to the ceremonial law of Moses, were to be equal partakers with the Jews in the gospel of Christ.

It gives us a just and grand idea of Christianity, when we thus see, that it is not a mere mode of religion, set up, once on a time, by a party of men, but that it is a uniform plan, laid out and conducted by the wisdom and power of God, reaching from the beginning to the consummation of all things, and comprehending both heaven and earth within its purpose.

The Jews were not aware of this, and mistook the true end, for which God had set up their religion. They had built too much on the extraordinary blessings God had vouchsafed them, as if, because he had chosen them, he had therefore cast off all the rest of mankind. It filled them with envy, that the salvation they had been carrying in their own bosom should be communicated to the Gentiles; but it made them indignant, when they perceived, that even their religious institution itself, which had carried this blessing, was now to be laid aside.

It was God only, who could set aside an institution, which he himself had set up; and

and it was God only who could provide a fit instrument for executing his own work. This God did, when he called St. Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles—the last person whom, at the time he was called, the disciples of Christ would have chosen for a partner in their work. But God, who not only sees but fashioneth the hearts of men, called him to it, and, mad as St. Paul was against those who preached the gospel, made him the most strenuous preacher and promoter of it.

But though the hand of God was necessary for turning St. Paul's heart to the work intended for him, yet, after his conversion, his former behaviour would naturally recommend his preaching, as it would evince his sincerity and the truth of what he taught. The more zealous St. Paul had been against the gospel, the greater testimony did his conversion afford in favour of it; for though men may take up opposite opinions upon slight or even false grounds, yet, the character and circumstances of St. Paul considered, he could not suddenly turn from being the bitterest enemy of the gospel, and shew himself its warmest advocate, but on a real and well-grounded conviction of its truth. St. Paul himself was
persuaded,

persuaded, that his former behaviour would convince even the Jews of the truth of what he preached — for when Christ bade him depart from Jerusalem, because the Jews would not receive his testimony, St. Paul pleads for staying, and says — “ Lord, they know, that “ I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue “ them that believed on thee.” — My former enmity against thy name must satisfy them, that my present zeal for it arises from the strongest means of conviction. — But Christ knew the Jews better than St. Paul did, and saw, what the Jews afterwards shewed, that, under the influence of pride, men are more open to resentment than reason.

It was too a circumstance of great weight against the necessity of the Jewish religion, that a man of St. Paul's education and estimation among the Jews, after having so vigorously defended that religion, was become as zealous to set it aside. — This was a matter, which whoever among the Jews should undertake was sure to meet with their resentment, and, if of an inferior character, with their contempt; and therefore, when it was undertaken by St. Paul, who, though he was the object of their resentment, was too significant to be the object of their contempt, it
carried

carried weight with it, and was as convincing to the Gentiles, as it was offensive to the Jews.

St. Paul had indeed the strongest means of conviction. It was a transaction full of wonder, but not more wonderful than proper. A sudden and glorious light in the heavens exhibited Jesus personally to St. Paul's view, and he heard his voice reproaching him for his furious behaviour against the Christians. Struck with the awful interview, St. Paul immediately gave in his submission — "Lord, " what wilt thou have me to do?" — We cannot conceive what St. Paul felt on this occasion, but we may well admire the propriety, as well as grandeur, of this transaction. We see the watchful care, which Christ has over his church, and the mighty power with which he protects it; when the leader of the very first persecution against it was thus stopped at his setting out, and, in an instant, confounded, subdued, and converted. Nor is it wonderful, that this effect, great as it was, should be so speedily wrought, when we consider, that St. Paul then saw that person of Christ, in which he will appear to judge the world. For, that Jesus Christ personally shewed himself to St. Paul on this occasion seems

seems plain, from what Ananias said to him, when he was got to Damascus—"The Lord, " even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in " the way as thou camest, hath sent me unto " thee"—consequently, St. Paul saw Jesus in that person in which he ascended into heaven, which the scripture assures us is the same in which he will descend to judge the world. Acts i. 11. — It is no wonder then, that St. Paul immediately submitted and was converted, before that presence where no sinner can justify himself, and the stoutest enemies of Christ must fall subdued.

But it was not merely St. Paul's conversion that was the object of this transaction. Christ, if he had so pleased, could have touched St. Paul's heart; and, without confounding him by the splendor of his person, might have melted down his enmity by the secret influence of his grace. But it was Christ's purpose that St. Paul should be not only a convert, but also an apostle. He was not only to embrace Christ's gospel, which he had so strongly hated, but he was to preach Christ's gospel, which he had so furiously opposed. It is on this circumstance, that St. Paul was to be an apostle, that the propriety of this transaction is eminently built; for if
St.

St. Paul was to be an apostle, it was proper he should be qualified as an apostle, that is, that he, as well as the other apostles, should receive his commission personally from Christ himself; — which he did on this occasion; for it was now that Christ said to him — “ I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister, and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will hereafter appear unto thee.” Acts xxvi. 16.

St. Paul much insists — that he was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles — that he was an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ — that the gospel he preached, he received not of man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. Certainly, the extraordinary manner of St. Paul's appointment not only confirms his apostleship, but distinguishes it; not indeed with greater authority, but with greater honour; the other apostles having received their commission from Christ in his state of humiliation, before he left them, but St. Paul received his commission from Christ in his state of exaltation; which, at the same time that it established his authority,

rity, afforded an additional divine testimony of the truth of the gospel itself; when, after setting it forth upon earth, Christ thus appeared again from heaven to confirm it; and having before sufficiently established the faith of his friends and followers, he now subdued the infidelity of a most active and furious enemy; whose conversion from Judaism effectually threw down the enclosure of that religion, and sent him out unexceptionably qualified for preaching the liberty of Christ's gospel to the Gentiles.

There is an observation or two naturally arising from this subject, too obvious to be omitted, but too plain to need enlarging upon.

1. We see from St. Paul's conduct before his conversion, how far prejudice against Christ's gospel may carry men—into such measures as are highly criminal, though they satisfy the conscience. A most dangerous situation! in which, ordinarily speaking, men are got beyond a possibility of being set right. St. Paul was recovered by the extraordinary grace of God—as he owns, and expresses his thanks for it—and he imputes his meeting with such grace to this circumstance, that he opposed the gospel ignorantly—

rantly—not sensible of its divine authority. This carried indeed not so much guilt in it, as if he had opposed the gospel under a full sense of its divine authority, but yet too much for admitting the plea, that he did it innocently; because St. Paul had sufficient means for his conviction before him, if he had attended to them, and had not been led to disregard them by the popular cry against the gospel, by his own juvenile heat of temper, and his sanguine attachment to the Jewish law and the authority of the rulers. The contempt of which means for his conviction, though it left him in ignorance of the true authority of the gospel, still left him inexcusable in his conduct against it. Nor did St. Paul pretend to justify his former conduct, but always condemned it, calling himself the greatest of sinners.

It would indeed be a strange, and a dangerous rule of casuistry, to pronounce every man free from guilt, who feels himself free from the reproaches of his own conscience, when it is so easy for any man to make himself ignorant or hardened through a voluntary neglect of the means he has of knowledge and reformation. Those who have the

offers of Christ's gospel before them, and will not examine its pretensions and evidence, must be ignorant of its merit and authority, and may feel their consciences as easy in despising it, as St. Paul found his in persecuting it; in which case however their guilt will be the same as his—a guilt which St. Paul sincerely deplored;—but let them not expect the same extraordinary means of conviction which St. Paul had, since God does not at this time of day want new apostles, nor do men want other means of conviction than what are already before them, if they will apply them.

2. We see from St. Paul's conduct, in his conversion, a useful lesson of humble submission to the Divine grace, whenever or however God calls us to a Christian faith, or to a better and a more Christian behaviour of life. We live not in times that require extraordinary interpositions of Providence to shew us true religion, and to direct us under it; but we live under the fullest supply of ordinary and sufficient means of instruction in both, if we will attend to them. And there is no man, I believe, either infidel or sinner, who goes on his way as gaily as St. Paul journeyed to Damascus, but what now and then meets with a gleam from

from heaven, that strikes across his path——some hint, some thought, some uncalled reflection, which startles him at least with a secret reproach of his conduct.—We should attend to such calls.—Secret and gentle as they may be, though perhaps they are sometimes strong and loud, they are calls of the same voice, which St. Paul heard, and to the same purpose, of serving God's glory and promoting our salvation; and should be answered with St. Paul's sincere submission—"Lord, what wilt thou have me "to do?"

It was St. Paul's happiness, however great his confusion at the presence of Christ, that he found himself in this situation, when there was yet time to put this important question. It will be too late for us to put it then, when, under the same confusion, we shall stand before the same presence at the day of judgment.

This consideration, with what we see in the example of St. Paul, should excite our attention to the calls of Divine grace. In the former part of St. Paul's conduct we see the guilt of setting ourselves with prejudice against the gospel of Christ. This we should diligently avoid.—In the latter part

of St. Paul's conduct we see his submission, and the mercy of God in accepting it. This we should as diligently imitate, attended as it is with an encouragement for our complying with every invitation of his grace that may call us to a Christian faith, or a better Christian behaviour. For St. Paul obtained mercy, as he himself says, not on his own account alone, but that the compassion he met with from Christ should be considered as an example of what our gracious Redeemer is ready to shew to all, who shall be converted to a faith in him, and obedience to his commands. "For this cause," he says, "I obtained mercy, that, in me first, Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." 1 Tim. i. 16.

May we all follow so good an example, upon so good encouragement! — and, having this eminent apostle's conversion in remembrance, may we shew forth our thankfulness for it in our imitation of it — in throwing aside our prejudices against Christ's gospel, which either vanity or vice may instil into us, and by a diligent attention to those calls and suggestions, which Christ daily

daily sets before us for reminding us of our duty, and crossing our path when we are intent on mischief and dishonour to him; remembering Christ's words to St. Paul, upon the occasion — "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." — Resistance against such calls is our destruction.

to the Court

and the Court in the morning at 10 o'clock
and making out the return we are
about to make and deliver to the
Court in the afternoon at 2 o'clock
and the Court will be in the
Court at 10 o'clock and the Court
will be in the Court at 10 o'clock

THE COURT

S E R M O N VI.

THE GOSPEL A NECESSARY MEANS OF
SALVATION.

ROM. i. 16.

*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ—
for it is the power of God unto salva-
tion.*

ST. Paul, in consequence of the appointment he had received from Christ, was obliged to preach the gospel to men of all sorts and conditions in the Gentile world. He was on this account, as he calls himself, a debtor both to the Greeks and the Barbarians, both to the wise and the unwise. The gospel he preached was fit for all conditions. As it did not, itself, despise the low and illiterate, so neither did it deserve to be despised by men of high station and learning. St. Paul therefore did not hide

himself or his gospel, but came forth and preached it in the most public and most eminent places.—He had preached it at Antioch, at Athens, at Ephesus, at Corinth, and says he is not ashamed to come and preach it even at Rome, the mistress of the world.

When St. Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, it is the same as if he had said he glories in it—such expression is common and intelligible. We may conceive, indeed, that under this expression lies a secret reference to the mean external appearance of the gospel, and of those who preached it, and especially to the ignominious death of its author. This may be suitable enough, but perhaps more than St. Paul intended, whose present thoughts seem to be employed on the great end and design of the gospel, rather than on the circumstances attending the delivery of it.

St. Paul sets forth the gospel as the work of God for the salvation of mankind. It is no human work, nor is it an ordinary work of God; but a work which employed the strength and energy of divine power, and that, not merely to benefit mankind, but to save them.

The

The miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles, for confirmation of their commission in preaching the gospel, were works of divine power; but when, besides these, we look at the whole scene of Providence, from the first promise of this salvation, and see by what steps God has worked to the opening it,—still works in the progress of it,—and will work to the consummation of it; a scene which exhibits the whole system of God's conduct with mankind from their creation to their exaltation; we then, and only then, discover what the apostle here means, when he calls the gospel of Christ the power of God to salvation.—Could the power of man, which exists to little purpose in the present moment, but cannot command what is past or future—could that power, or any less than divine power, work through ages, and to such a purpose?

The object of this divine work was the salvation of mankind;—concerning which, there naturally arise two questions:—How does the gospel of Christ procure our salvation?—and, What need is there for it?

The apostle here answers both these questions.

The

The gospel of Christ procures our salvation, because therein is revealed the righteousness of God—not the righteousness belonging to God, but the righteousness, or duty, which God hath proposed and promised to accept of us;—which, in short, is a faith in what Christ hath done for us, leading to a faith in what he hath promised for us, upon our obedience to his commands. This is the righteousness of God, as it is the righteousness which God hath proposed; and this is the righteousness, which, if we attain it, will save us—according to the prophetic declaration of old—
 “The just shall live by faith.”

But what need of all this?—The apostle answers in the next verse. “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men;” which implies, that men have not in themselves such righteousness as will render them acceptable to God, but, on the contrary, that their unrighteousness exposes them to the anger of God, which they are assured of in the same revelation which shews them by what righteousness they may render themselves acceptable to him.

This

This charge lays against the whole race of mankind; among whom there is none who is righteous, that is, none who is not unrighteous; and this unrighteousness, the apostle says, was not from a want of better knowledge, but in contradiction to it: mankind had the truth, but they held it in unrighteousness, did not live answerable to the means of knowledge which they had before them.

As St. Paul is writing to Rome, the capital of the Heathen world, he first points this charge at the Heathens, and then at the Jews who were residing there, and to whom he was writing: he shews them what means of knowledge they both had, and how very unrighteous they both were under it. Yet the Jews boasted in their righteousness under the law of Moses, and the Heathens in theirs under the study of wisdom and philosophy. The former, on account of their obedience to the law of Moses, thought themselves more worthy of salvation than the Gentiles; which notion if they did not carry so far as absolutely to exclude the Gentiles from any share in it, yet would not admit them into it unless they were circumcised: whilst the Gentiles, on their part, thought themselves

selves more worthy of salvation than the Jews, on account of their study in wisdom and philosophy, the fortitude, justice, and glory of their heroes and sages, on which they claimed a sufficient and superior merit above the Jews, who had ever been, though a distinguished, yet a rebellious and obstinate people. But St. Paul tells them, that neither the one nor the other sort of righteousness could entitle them to salvation, which was the free gift of God, not what either of them could claim, and was only to be had under that method which God had appointed—that method which God hath appointed for accepting and treating man as righteous, and which, therefore, is called the righteousness of God, and which is, according to the peculiar expression of the apostle, “the righteousness of God from faith to faith;”—the meaning of which is, that as, in order to salvation, it is necessary that we believe in what Christ hath done, so, in consequence of such faith, we must proceed to believe in what Christ hath promised, and, in consequence of both, to do what Christ hath commanded—our faith and obedience constantly promoting and increasing each other.

By

By this faith we live, that is, it is by such faith that we acquire a life of righteousness or acceptance with God; which we cannot attain but by a sincere faith in the redemption which Christ hath wrought for us; nor can we preserve and grow up in such life but by a constant adherence to this faith in Christ, and as constant a fidelity and obedience to his commands.

For in vain may we expect to be accepted as righteous before God, by merely believing what Christ hath done for us, unless we give ourselves up to him and do what he hath commanded us. As well may we expect to recover of a distemper by believing our physician to be an able man, without following his directions.

We see then how the gospel of Christ procures our salvation, and what need there is for it; — we see in it the power and the goodness of God, which St. Paul sets forth as the reason why he was not ashamed, why he gloried, in preaching it even in the capital city of Rome.

It is obvious to remark, that whatever was a reason why St. Paul should not be ashamed to preach the gospel of Christ, will always be a reason for their veneration of it, who are
fo

so blessed as to live under it. And yet this very circumstance, that we are born, educated, and live under the gospel, is what leads too many to neglect, if not despise it. The greatest blessings are disregarded by being common. We in this part of the world, who see the sun rise every morning, feel not that joy and admiration at its appearance, which they feel who, in other parts of the world, see it rise but once a year.

Yet the blessing is not the less, however our attention to it may diminish; and though the first Christians were more transported with the sight, when they saw the Sun of righteousness, the gospel of Christ, at its first rising upon the world, yet, we must be strangely insensible, who live under its meridian brightness, if we, though less transported, do not feel its warmth. As for those who are ashamed of it, and revile it, we know the natural judgment we pass on those who hate day-light, and our Saviour has directed us to pass the same judgment on those who hate the light of his gospel.

All good men, all who are desirous to be good men, will have a love for Christ's gospel. All who have faith in the being of a God, or any regard for their own being, will
feel

feel comfort, that they have this method of eternal salvation proposed to them. For, consider what a proposal this is. Here we are sent into this world by the appointment of God, to live but a short time, and that full of trouble; our best enjoyments are no better; whatever becomes of us hereafter, we are sure we cannot stay long here; we come up and are cut down like the flowers — our life flieth like a shadow, and never continueth in one stay — in the midst of life we are in death. — Where shall we find succour and assistance in this condition? We cannot help one another, we cannot all combine to silence the troubles of life, or to hold the arm of death.

In this situation we can look up to none but God, to him who sent us into life, and who will dispose of us, when he takes us out of it. — But where? — or how? — It is a question worth asking, it is a question we cannot avoid asking. If we can be assured that God is pleased with us, we may feel comfort in the question; but what must we feel if we have reason to think, that God is justly displeased with us! No one who believes there is a God, and who thinks at all, can be indifferent whether God be pleased or displeased with him; and no one who
thinks

thinks at all, but must be sensible he is a sinner, and that God is justly displeased with sin. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." — We may have goodness too; for there is a mixture of both in the heart of man; and, as the best among us are not entirely free from sin, so we may hope that the worst are not entirely void of goodness; and in stating our accounts with one another we may well enough balance virtues against vices, and allow him to be good who is not very bad. But this is mere human reckoning, and will not be admitted at the divine tribunal. God is of purer eyes than to behold, with approbation, any, the least, iniquity, and when he enters into judgment with us, none can be accepted as righteous in his sight, but he who hath no unrighteousness in him, or, who hath sufficient mediation to atone for it. — How then shall any of the sons of men, the very best among them, stand, without Christ's mediation, to be judged at the divine tribunal? — Repent we may, it is the natural condition of a sinner at the approach of justice; but how shall we be assured that repentance, mere repentance, will prove a sufficient mediation for our unrighteousness — shall satisfy the justice, and avert the displeasure of God? —

Let

Let our reasoners and thinkers answer this question, to the comfort of a dying sinner—if they can.

What then is to be done? Are we sent into this world for a short span of time, to live without comfort and die without hope?—Here then the gospel of Christ comes seasonably in to our relief; with the proposal of a method, which, if we will make use of it, shall render us acceptable to God here, and eternally happy with him hereafter. The gospel of Christ assures us, that, though we are not righteous enough of ourselves to deserve the favour of God, but, on the contrary, in our natural condition are obnoxious to his displeasure for our sins, yet, for the merits of his Son Christ Jesus, who died to remove the guilt and punishment of our sins, God will accept us as righteous, provided we repent, and believe in his Son, and faithfully endeavour to live as he hath taught and commanded us; his mediation shall recommend our repentance, which, when laid on his merits, shall effectually procure that pardon from God, which we could not be assured it would work alone.

What a turn does this gracious proposal give to our present condition, which but just

now appeared so wretched! Under the acceptance and application of this proposal, the conscience of sin, that weight, which otherwise must sink us in despair, is removed by a full assurance of pardon; and *that* once set aside, the troubles of life, the shortness of it, and the certainty of death, sit lightly on the mind; the troubles of life are lost in the comfortable reflection, that we are making ourselves acceptable to God; and for the shortness of life, and the certainty of death, however they may alarm those who know not where they are going, yet are they matters of great joy to that soul, which is not afraid of his displeasure to whose bosom it is flying, and where it shall exchange the short troubles of this life for the eternal glories of the next.

The enemies of the gospel should bring weighty arguments indeed, if they would persuade us to reject so advantageous a proposal as this, even if it had but slender authority to support it. — But, supported as it is upon such solid demonstrations of divine power and wisdom, in the preparation, — in the delivery, — and in the establishment of it, it is wonderful that any should set themselves to oppose it
with

with such weak arguments as they do. The reason and the danger of such opposition, let those look to who make it; — but oppose who will, and what they will, “the
“ gospel of Christ is the power and wisdom
“ of God unto salvation;” — and whethe
is safer, to depend on the weakness and folly
of men, or on the power and wisdom of God—
judge ye!

with such weak arguments as they do. The
 reason and the danger of their opposition,
 let those look to whom it is sent; — but on
 their side will, and what they will, "the
 Gospel of Christ is the power and wisdom
 of God, his salvation; — and what is
 it like, to be sent on the weak and holy
 of men, on the power and wisdom of God —

judge what it is, and what it is worth.

The first of these arguments is, that the

weakness of the Gospel is its strength.

The second is, that the Gospel is the power

and wisdom of God, his salvation.

The third is, that the Gospel is the power

and wisdom of God, his salvation.

The fourth is, that the Gospel is the power

and wisdom of God, his salvation.

The fifth is, that the Gospel is the power

and wisdom of God, his salvation.

The sixth is, that the Gospel is the power

and wisdom of God, his salvation.

The seventh is, that the Gospel is the power

and wisdom of God, his salvation.

The eighth is, that the Gospel is the power

and wisdom of God, his salvation.

The ninth is, that the Gospel is the power

and wisdom of God, his salvation.

The tenth is, that the Gospel is the power

and wisdom of God, his salvation.

The eleventh is, that the Gospel is the power

and wisdom of God, his salvation.

The twelfth is, that the Gospel is the power

and wisdom of God, his salvation.

SERMON VII.

The same Subject continued.

ROMANS i. 18.

*The wrath of God is revealed from heaven
against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of
men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.*

IN my last discourse, on a passage previous to this text, I briefly explained the character which the apostle gives of Christ's gospel, when he calls it "the power of God unto salvation" — as it is the method which God in his goodness and mercy, as well as in his wisdom and power, hath appointed for accepting man as righteous, who is not so of himself; and this method is — that man believes in Christ, and sincerely endeavours to live as he hath taught and commanded him.

But this method, which God hath appointed for the salvation of man, is a dispensation of justice as well as mercy, however desirous we may be of looking at it as a dispensation of mercy only. It is not wonderful we should be desirous to think it so, but it is dangerous to persuade ourselves it is so; — and quite unreasonable, if it be unreasonable to set aside any of God's attributes. If God was a God of no mercy, what would become of us? But what shall we make of him, if he be a God of no justice? These attributes must operate together in the divine conduct, where wisdom and power are infinite, as well as justice and mercy.

Previous to the Christian dispensation, mankind, being all unrighteous, are in a state of condemnation, exposed to the wrath of God; in this dispensation a method is proposed for their being accepted with God as righteous, if they will apply it — This is mercy. But if they will not apply it, they are then left in that state, in which they would have been, if no such dispensation had been made, exposed to the wrath of God — because they will not draw over it that veil, which God hath provided in Christ Jesus — This is justice; — in which case it is not God who

who punishes man for rejecting God's salvation, but man chuses to be miserable, notwithstanding God has provided for his salvation:—and St. Paul's declaration in the words of my text, as it shews the condition of those who are without the gospel of Christ, shews the duty of those who are under it—that they are to live up to it, if they would be saved by it.

For when we reflect on our condition as Christians, and consider how great mercy is shewn us in this proposal of salvation, and how great happiness will accrue to us from applying it, we must at the same time remember well the tremendous justice that awaits us if we neglect or misapply it. We must, I say, remember this, not only because it is as much a part of God's dispensation as the other, but also because it naturally excites our attention to this method of our salvation to consider, that, if we refuse or abuse it, we are lost for ever. Fear is a predominant principle in the human heart; and, generally speaking, the fear of evil operates more powerfully than the proposal of good. God, who made the human heart, and set in it such principles as are suited to the condition of man, has always governed him according

to what he hath made him; in all his dispensations he mixes threatenings with his promises, that, where the love of good should prove too weak to draw us, the fear of the opposite evil may drive us to our duty. And though the fear of evil is, upon comparison, a less worthy principle of duty than the love of good, yet is it a useful principle, and, the disposition of mankind considered, a necessary one; — the worst are hardly to be reclaimed without it, and the best are hardly so perfect as to have no need of it.

Indeed this part of the Christian dispensation, which shews us the justice and wrath of God, is not so pleasing to the view as that which shews us his mercy and favour; yet neither is it so terrible that we dare not look at it. The consideration of God's justice is alarming only to those who abuse his mercy; to those who accept and apply his proposals, it is additional matter of confidence, that they are in the hands of him, who is not only good to propose, but just to perform what he proposes. And though the justice of God's wrath be terrible to think of, yet, till we have sinned beyond a possibility of avoiding it, the justice of his favour is a consideration that will always supply us with

comfort; and the just punishment which will attend the refusal of that method which he hath appointed for our salvation, will cease to terrify those, who are ready to accept and careful to apply that method, according to his directions.

Now our application of this method consists in our performing what God proposes and requires we should do, in consequence of it. They are three things — that we repent of our sins — that we have faith in what Christ hath done for our salvation — and, that we sincerely endeavour to live as he hath taught and commanded us.

But we are well to observe — that it is not a partial performance, but it is the performance of all that God thus requires of us, which is the proper application of this method, and which will entitle us to the benefit of it. — Yet so it is, that the same disposition in us, by which we are inclined to think of God as a God of mercy only, makes us also willing to think, that, of three things which God requires us to do for our salvation, one of them only is sufficient; not considering, that, as in the one case, by setting aside God's justice, we deny the perfection of his nature, so, in the other case, we reject the method he hath appointed

appointed for our salvation, by setting aside any one or more of the requisites contained in it; — for if God requires three things of us in order for his acceptance of us as righteous, and we perform but one of these three, how can we be said to apply that method which God hath appointed for accepting us? and if we do not apply that method, how can we expect to be accepted of him?

It is not wonderful, that of these three requisites in our salvation, we are most ready to apply ourselves to a faith in Christ, and to think that sufficient for our purpose. A religion, that consists of faith only, is as agreeable to the laziness of our disposition, as a God that hath no other attribute but mercy only. But can we think that a God of infinite wisdom would have wrought so costly a dispensation only for men to believe that he hath wrought it? — a dispensation, which, confirmed as it is by such demonstration of divine power, it is much harder to deny, than it is to believe. — Reason bids us expect more; and revelation tells us what it is — that all this was done, not merely that we might believe it, but that believing we might become obedient to God — and through that obedience proceed to eternal happiness in heaven,

heaven! — Upon the whole, as the same reason and the same revelation, which tells us that God is a God of mercy, tells us likewise that he is a God of justice also; and as the same God, who requires our faith in Christ, requires likewise our repentance and obedience as necessary for our acceptance with him; it follows, that as reasonably may we set aside all these three requisites, as set aside any one of them, and as reasonably may we set aside all God's attributes, as set aside any one of his commands.

The apostle, in the text before us, expressly sets forth the wrath of God against such as "hold the truth in unrighteousness" — a character, which, indeed, belongs to those in the natural state of the world, who believed in a God yet lived wickedly; but surely it as well suits those under the gospel, who believe in Christ yet live unbecoming their faith and profession. If Jews and Gentiles were exposed to the wrath of God, because they lived not up to the knowledge they had under the law of Moses, or of nature, how much greater must be their condemnation, who, having received the truth of Christ's gospel, withhold and suppress

suppress even that truth by a wicked behaviour; — not heeding the guidance of, his hand, who came down from the bosom of God to set the happiness of heaven in full view before us, to shew us the way, and who offers to lead us up to it!

And yet, what do we see! — We are born and live in a Christian country, where we are early instructed in the faith of Christ, and profess it all our lives long. Yet, how many have we among us who do not know what it is they profess? and how many more, who do not live up to what they know? How many are called Christians, who are as ignorant of the principles as they are void of the practice of Christianity! And for those who are in a better condition, who have the truth and knowledge of Christ's gospel in their heads, it is true of too many, what the apostle says of the Gentiles, that they "hold the truth in unrighteousness;" — if they have it in their hearts, it is there more like a prisoner fettered in a dungeon, without power of exerting himself, than like a master in his house, governing and well ordering his family. The lusts and passions of men, as they get the better of their reason, get the better of their

their religion also; and though their passions may not be strong enough to turn religion out, which however is too often the case, yet they confine it from having that influence on their behaviour which it ought to have, and which it is naturally adapted to work.

This is holding the truth in unrighteousness, when men do not attend to the dictates of the religion which they have embraced, but neglect its duties, and follow the call of their affections as freely as if they had received no such religion, or as if the religion they have received had no such duties belonging to it. They who do so are to be admonished not to trust in the faith they profess for being accepted with God, but to remember what the apostle hath set forth in my text—that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against those who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

Indeed we are all concerned in this admonition, as perhaps there are very few whose religion hath all that influence on their behaviour which it might and ought to have. But human frailty is one thing, and contempt of God's mercy and authority is another. The good Christian, who sincerely endeavours
to

to live as Christ hath taught and commanded him, though he cannot expect to live free from all failings, will however live free from notorious ones; and for those he commits he will be careful to apply that remedy which his religion prescribes, by a true repentance and earnest prayer to God through Jesus Christ for pardon of them; and when he is on his knees on such occasion, he may well think of God as a God of mercy; — his religion warrants him to think him so, and he shall surely find him so.

But when men carry no more of their religion about them than the name of it; when they bend their whole attention to the things of the world, and scarce will give a look, and that a very transient one, at what religion sets before them; as they are not the better, so neither must they expect to be the happier, for a faith, which they profess only, but which they do not feel. It is an essential part, and the very description of religion, that it influences our behaviour; — those therefore who withhold it from influencing their behaviour, destroy the very nature of it, and make it no religion at all; and, what is a farther bad consequence in this

this matter, in proportion, as men withhold their religion from influencing their behaviour, they expose it to the influence of other principles, and, as they feel not the check which religion sets upon the heart, they are not concerned about little failings, nor secured against great ones. — Thus human frailty becomes vice, before men are aware of it, — but after they have lost strength to stop it. — This is despising the mercy of God, when men set aside the proposals of salvation which God hath made them, to follow the proposals of the world and their own affections; and this is setting aside God's proposals, and despising his authority, when men refuse him that obedience of their lives which he requires, and yet expect to be accepted of him without it. Whatever we may expect, such neglect of the mercy and authority of God must lead to his wrath.

To prevent so dreadful a consequence, let us accustom ourselves to think frequently and seriously of our condition, what we are here, and what we are to be hereafter. Here we are examples of God's mercy; as here God sets before us a method, if we will apply it, for making ourselves acceptable to him;

him; hereafter we shall be examples, either of his mercy, or of his justice, according as we apply or neglect this method. Let us frequently reflect on this method, what it is, and how easy to be applied; — to repent of and forsake what both disgraces us and hurts us even here, and what it is our real interest to avoid, if we were concerned only here; — to ask pardon for our sins through him who came down from God on purpose to procure it for us — to love and obey him who shed his blood to save us.

Has the world any proposals sufficient to outweigh this proposal of God for our salvation? In our serious and sober judgments we cannot think so; — when our judgments are dissipated in the pleasures and business of the world, we do not think at all. — Let us then, to get rid of such dissipation, accustom ourselves to think — to think above the world — to think of the happiness which the mercy of God has provided for us, if we apply this method of our salvation — and to think of the punishment, which not only his justice has provided, but the natural course of things must produce, for those who shall neglect it. — And when

we have surveyed what we are, and what we may be, let us then ask ourselves, whether the proposals of God for our salvation, in their whole extent of obedience as well as faith, be not well worth our constant attention?—and, whether it be not madness, if we suffer the transitory pleasures and enjoyments of this world to deprive us of the eternal happiness, and plunge us into the eternal misery, of the next?

we have surveyed what we are, and what we
may be, let us then all ourselves, whether
the people of God, or our salvation, in
their whole extent of holiness, as well as
faith, be not well worth our constant atten-
tion;—and, whether it be not needful, if we
suffer the transitory pleasures and enjoyments
of this world to deprive us of the eternal
happiness, and plunge us into the eternal mis-
ery of the next.

the being and perfection of God; many did
 not know him; and those who did not, might

S E R M O N VIII.

CONSEQUENCES OF REJECTING THE G O S P E L.

THEY were capable of discovering
 the nature of God, which is more than

was capable of discovering as much as it was
 independent for — **R O M A N S i. 28.**

*As they did not like to retain God in their
 knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate
 mind.*

ST. Paul in this chapter very largely sets
 out the moral, or rather the immoral,
 state of the heathen world before the gospel
 of Christ was known among them; and the
 text I have now read to you points out two
 observations that may be drawn from it,
 which I shall make the subject of my present
 discourse.

The first observation is — that the Gentiles
 had the knowledge of God, but did not like
 to retain it.

The Gentiles were capable of discovering the being and perfections of God ; many did discover them ; and those who did not, might, if they had applied their natural faculties, and attended to what they saw about them. The apostle says — “ That which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them.” Not that they were capable of discovering all that belongs to the nature of God, which is more than even revelation hath shewn us ; but that they were capable of discovering as much as it was expedient for them to know of God — his eternity, his power, and his godhead or divinity ; by which last term the apostle seems to understand those perfections, which naturally occur to the mind under the word God — that is, a being infinitely good, just, and wise, the maker and governor of the world. All this the apostle says the Gentiles might discover of God from the visible works of the creation. God, he says, had shewed them all this ; which expression, as the Gentiles had no supernatural revelation to instruct them, must mean the natural intellectual faculties, which God had given them, and by their application of which, to what they saw in the world about them, they might

might discover the being and perfections of God.

But the Gentiles either neglected to attain this knowledge, which might be the case with the generality of them—or they did not like to retain it,—by making a proper use of it, which was the case with the rest; for they all refused to pay God that honour and obedience which was due to him, and in so doing were all of them inexcusable; the one part, in not having a knowledge, which they might and ought to have had; the other part, in not rightly applying a knowledge which they had. — The apostle says, “they did not like to retain God in their knowledge;” which shews, that God had not only given them natural intellectual faculties sufficient for discovering him, if they would apply them, but had left them free in their use of them. The wisdom of God hath ever dealt with man according to what he hath made him. God made him a rational free being, and he hath always treated him as such. It was necessary that man should have a knowledge of God, in order to obey him; and this knowledge, which it was necessary for man to have, God sets before him in a way in which it was suitable for man to receive it; it was

not forced upon him, but set within his reach, if he would choose to seek it, and to keep it. St. Paul very aptly expresses this in his discourse to the Athenians, where he speaks of "feeling after God that they may find him;" this implies not only choice in seeking a knowledge of God, but so much difficulty too, as may serve to excite men's attention in coming at it. It was a knowledge, which, if the Gentiles did not care to have it, they might be without, and, if they did not like to retain it, they might lose it.

And let us not think ourselves unconcerned in what the apostle here says of the Gentiles. In all his dispensations; whether natural or supernatural, God deals with man, as with a rational free being. In his natural dispensation God set the knowledge of himself before man, and left him to attain it by the application of his rational faculties to the ordinary works of Divine power observable in the creation and preservation of the world; and when men had neglected or much abused this knowledge, and were become obnoxious to God's wrath, he, in his supernatural dispensation, set the knowledge of his Son Christ Jesus before them, and left them to attain it by the application of their rational faculties to the

the extraordinary works of Divine power by which he introduced it. — Men may neglect to attain, or they may not like to retain this knowledge of Christ Jesus, as the Gentiles despised the knowledge of God, which was set before them. — But let them look well to the consequence of this, lest, by following the example of the Gentiles, they fall into their condition; — which was this:

“Because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.” — This is the second observation arising from the text; — and an observation it is well worthy our attention.

What reprobate enormities the Gentiles fell into, I need not set forth. St. Paul has recounted them. It is more to our purpose to take notice, *how* they fell into them. — It was thus — “God gave them over to a reprobate mind,”

We are not to understand this, as if their enormities could be at all imputable to God, as the author of them. “Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; — every man, when he is tempted, is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.” — As God hath made us free to choose either good or evil, we ourselves only are blameable if we

choose evil; and as we are left to ourselves to choose, either the one or the other, so, if after we have chosen evil, we be still left to ourselves, it will be as natural for us to run farther into the excesses of it, and we shall be as blameable for such excess of evil, as we were for the first choice of it.

With respect to the Gentiles, God gave them sufficient understanding for knowing him, and their duty, but, instead of applying their understanding to this purpose, they applied it in disobeying him; and, having made this wrong choice, they were not likely, of themselves, to relinquish it, but to pursue it, wherever it might carry them. They did so. God not driving them into their notorious excesses, nor yet withholding them:— he sent no prophets among them, and their philosophers were not sufficient to reclaim them. Thus God shewed mankind a proof of their depravity, how prone they were to sin, and how unable, of themselves, to find a recovery from it, that, being convinced of this, they might the more readily embrace that offer of salvation which he was preparing to set before them in the gospel of Christ.

The account then, which the Christian apostle hath given us of the Gentile world before

before the gospel, and which the best heathen sages allow to be true, shews the dangerous state to which man is exposed, when God withholds his direction, and leaves him to his own corrupt disposition. We who live under the gospel dispensation are particularly concerned in giving due attention to this warning, because we live under the last dispensation of God's will. When God permitted the Gentiles to run into their reprobate excesses, there was yet a remedy at hand, on which, if they would lay hold, they might recover themselves: — great numbers did lay hold of it, and, by embracing the gospel, were saved. But if we, who have already accepted the gospel, should by our behaviour provoke God to withhold his direction, and leave us to ourselves, on what remedy shall we lay hold, after despising the last that will be offered?

Let us then well beware how we provoke God to withdraw his grace and direction from us, and, leaving us to ourselves, give us up to the enormities of a reprobate mind!

And let us well observe the matter of provocation here mentioned by the apostle, on account of which God gave up the Gentiles

to

to a reprobate mind. — “They did not like
 “to retain God in their knowledge, therefore
 “God gave them over to a reprobate mind.”—
 Surely, and justly, if we cast off God, God
 will cast off us, and the more justly, in pro-
 portion to the greater advances he hath made
 towards us, and the fuller means he hath set
 before us for knowing and obeying him. If
 we cast off God after we have known him,
 not only in his work of creation, as did the
 Gentiles; but more fully in his work of re-
 demption, which the Gentiles did not, our
 provocation in casting him off, after such
 intimate acquaintance with him, must cer-
 tainly appear much greater than theirs, who
 had to “feel after him that they might find
 “him.”

We should then be very careful not to
 reject him who hath made such advances to
 embrace us, and hath supplied us with such
 means for knowing him, and such reasons for
 loving him; — and, if we would avoid the
 dreadful curse of being given over to a re-
 probate mind, we must be watchful to keep
 up a sense of Christ's religion alive and active
 in it. This is our great support in our
 present state of frailty, as this either keeps us
 from sin, or helps us to recover out of it.

Such a sense is a great check against deliberate sins; and as for casual sins, though it may not always secure us from them, yet he who is possessed with a sense of religion is less disposed to fall into them — more upon his guard against them — and more active in recovering himself from them. When such a one falls into sin, as he still bears God's authority and law in his mind, his conscience has something to be employed about, which will not fail leading him to repentance, and better caution for the future; but he, who has no sense of religion, has no conscience, at least none that shews him he has done wrong; and he, who is not sensible he is wrong, can feel no motive for setting himself right. Thus, by not having a sense of religion in their hearts, men become not only more liable to sin but more hardened in it; which should make us very watchful in keeping such sense secure within us, as it is so useful a guide to our frailty, our best assistant in duty, and our best counsellor and friend under transgression.

But when the mind has lost a sense of religion, it is under no guidance, has no assistant, no counsellor — at least no safe one: — our reason, which we are so apt to boast of, in this situation is not to be trusted; it is a
faculty

faculty which we have from God, and is then only to be depended upon, when it operates under his influence who hath set it within us. Reason, with religion at her side, is a distinguishable guide, and may safely be followed; but without her attendant, religion, we are apt to mistake our reason; — we easily find a reason, as we call it, for whatever we have a mind to do — and we see, from St. Paul's account of them, into what gross enormities the Gentiles reasoned themselves, when they had lost their knowledge of God.

To say the truth, this high opinion of our reason, which the mind feels, when it is destitute of a sense of religion, is often the very cause that works the removal of it. — There are many causes which may operate to destroy a sense of religion in our minds — that lamp we carry within us to light us in our duty: — carelessness may let it go out for want of thought; — the business of the world may suffocate it; — the blasts of folly and pleasure may put it out; — corruption of morals may quench it; — but the pride of understanding totally extinguishes it, and leaves the mind in utter darkness.

This pride of the understanding oftentimes arises from corruption of manners, and often-

times

times produces it, but does not seem to be always and necessarily connected with it. — For we may see those who carry this pride of understanding very high, and yet are far from being remarkable for a corruption of manners; in social and moral conduct no men behave better; they are sensible men too,—men of parts and understanding—but they have no notion of religion:—we cannot help wondering at this. We see many, indeed, who, plainly enough, set aside religion, because it does not suit with their wicked course of life; but what quarrel can men have with religion, if they be really good men? What has God done to them, that should make them thus angry with him as to exclude him only out of their list of duties, and, whilst they are very punctual in doing every thing for their neighbour that he can require or desire of them, will do nothing for God, will have nothing at all to say to him.—The truth is this:—

There is such a thing as spiritual wickedness as well as carnal wickedness; and these men, however free they may be from the latter, are deeply stained with the former. The great spiritual wickedness is that pride of the understanding we are now speaking of, and is the very sin, which the devil suggested

to our first parents, when he prompted them to the attempt of being "as Gods, knowing good and evil." — The very same pride of understanding shews itself in these men — they want not, it seems, God's revelations, and extol the sufficiency of human reason; — that is, in short, their own parts and understanding; their high opinion of which prompts them to call every thing to the bar of their free examination, even the conduct of God himself, which, because they cannot comprehend it (as how should they?), they pronounce impertinent; and will have nothing to do with it.

This sort of pride may easily be consistent with rectitude of moral conduct — nay, it may promote it; — for, as such men maintain they can be good without God's help and direction, they oblige themselves to shew they are so. — But, whatever good conduct they may connect with this pride, it is a *vice*, and, if scripture may be heeded, it is the first vice belonging to human nature, and the most fatal in its effects, as it is the vice which turned our first parents out of paradise, and the indulgence of which may keep their posterity out of heaven. Christ, who came to shew us the way to heaven, pointed out humility of mind as the true way thither, not a haughty self-sufficient spirit.

Our

Our rational faculties are indeed a blessing; but when we set them above, but especially when we set them against, him who gave them, such abuse may provoke God to withdraw them.

If then these men be sincere, when they tell us, that they pay no regard to the gospel of Christ, because the evidence alleged in support of its divine truth and authority does not appear satisfactory to them, however it may appear so to others — what have we to conclude, but that their sin of intellectual pride has provoked God to give them up to a reprobate mind, and to leave them in a darkness of their own procuring; — that God hath judicially blinded their eyes, so that the same evidence of Christ's gospel, which appears satisfactory to others of like abilities, does not appear so to them?

There is nothing absurd in this conclusion; holy scripture warrants it. God, who made us, has all our faculties, intellectual and corporeal, in his power, and can deprive us of any of them in what manner and degree he pleases; the use of our rational faculties, as well as the use of our limbs, may be either totally or partially withheld; — and, when a man has employed the good parts and understanding

ing God hath given him in despising him and disparaging his revelations, God may, if he thinks fit, strike a partial numbness on his mind, which, whilst it leaves his rational faculty sound in other occupations of it, shall disable it from understanding what others understand of that revelation which he has despised.

If this may be the case, we have great reason to pray, as directed in our litany — “from
“ all hardness of heart, and contempt of thy
“ holy word and commandments, Good Lord,
“ deliver us.”

S E R M O N IX.

FAITH IN CHRIST;

MATTHEW viii. 2, 3.

Behold, there came a leper, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. — And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; — be thou clean.

IT is an obvious remark on our Saviour's miracles, that they shew as much benignity as power; Christ went about doing good, as well as working miracles. The Jews, perversely, required a sign of him—as if the power Christ shewed in healing the sick, by a touch, or a word, was not a sufficient testimony of his divine authority, but they must needs have some glorious or some terrible display of almighty power to convince

them of it. This is but the usual pretence of infidelity, which always demands unreasonable evidence; but Christ, who came to convince reasonable minds, not to indulge the perverse humours of men, did not think fit to gratify them; the miracles Christ wrought were sufficient signs, not only of divine power but of divine goodness — such as well suited his mission, who was come with salvation; the benignity they carried with them was a natural incitement of attention, and the cure of diseased bodies was a natural introduction to the cure of diseased souls.

The present object of our Saviour's benignity and power was a leper. We read of this disease in the Old Testament, and it seems to have been peculiarly inflicted on the Jews as a chastisement for grievous sins. When Miriam spake against Moses she was struck with leprosy; it was therefore a punishment appropriated to a contempt of God's authority and appointments; — and well it is for modern infidels, that God does not think fit to continue this mark of his displeasure beyond the Jewish dispensation. It was held to be a disease incurable by human skill; the priests, indeed, were appointed to inspect and judge of
of

of it,—but they could not remove it. This disease being inflicted by the divine hand for grievous offences, and only to be removed by the same hand, it is no wonder they looked upon it with horror, and that they avoided those that were afflicted with it, who, according to their law, were excluded from common society, till the disease was cured. And it was with singular propriety, as well as benignity, that Christ set himself to the relief of those miserable objects. Christ's cure of all diseases was truly miraculous, and real proofs of his divine power; but his cure of the leprosy was particularly adapted for the observation of the Jews, as it was the cure of a disease, which they acknowledged the hand of God only could remove.

There was, besides, a farther propriety in Christ's healing this disease, as it distinctly expressed the great purpose of his coming to cleanse us from sin, that leprosy of the soul, which excludes us from the favour and society of God, and leaves us under that sentence of death and condemnation, which the justice of God had laid upon mankind, and which his mercy alone, which Christ came to administer, could remove. The same heavenly physician, who healed the miserable leper,

is ready to heal the much more miserable sinner; and we may learn, from the leper's behaviour, described in my text, on what terms we may expect our cure, and with what disposition we are to apply for it:—a sense of our own wretchedness, with a faith in Christ's ability to purify and save us, is a necessary qualification for our spiritual cure, as it was for the leper's bodily cure.

We cannot help noting the modest humility of this poor wretch's application:—sensible that his disease was the punishment of his sins, he dares not to ask Christ, in direct terms, that he would heal him; but, expressing only his faith in the power of Christ, without presuming to solicit his will, modestly says, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”

Christ frequently put the question, to those who came to be healed by him, whether they believed he had power to do what they asked? Christ put this question, not for information, for he wanted none, but thereby declaring, that he expected their faith in his having such power, as the terms on which they should receive the benefit of it. Very reasonable terms, surely! to which no one, who felt himself miserable, could or would make

make any objection. To have relief for asking it, is a very easy condition ; and to believe that he, of whom we ask relief, is able to afford it, is as necessary, as the other is easy, since otherwise we mock both him and ourselves.— Whilst Christ was thus performing his miraculous cures, we do not find any so absurd to put the question, Why does he not heal us without our asking him ? or, Why, if we apply to him, does he not heal us without demanding our faith in him ? — for (as a free-thinker would say) true benignity works unsolicited, and unconditionally. — It may do so in many cases ; but to say it ought to do so in all cases, is confounding benignity with justice ; for what we receive from another, which he ought to give, is in him matter of justice and duty, not of benignity and favour, which, in the very nature of it, must be free ; and, so long as the terms of a favour are mutually reasonable, the refusal of the terms must be allowed a just reason for refusing the favour. Christ had certainly a right to confer his benefits on his own terms ; and, when the terms he made was a faith in his divine power, after giving such proofs of it as were incontestably sufficient, they must needs be incontestably reasonable.

Faith in the power of God is the foundation of religion ; — it was the first step, into which Christ set those who came to him ; and this faith continues to lay at the bottom of our Christian faith. “ He that cometh to God (*i. e.* hath any religion), must believe that he is able to reward those who seek him ;” and those who profess the Christian religion must believe, that whatever he hath promised he is able also to perform. It is the ground-work of the Christian religion, that we believe in the power of God in raising us from the dead ; and this great effect of the divine power, in raising up our dead bodies to life, is, in a good degree, exemplified and foreshewn by Christ’s restoring diseased bodies to health ; and it seems to be with great propriety that Christ made faith in the power of God a qualification in those who applied to him for the benefit of his miracles, when the same is a necessary qualification for obtaining the benefit of his much greater work of salvation.

The faith which Christ required of those who asked to be healed was, that he came from God, and had power to heal them ; the reason they had for such faith was the mira-

cles he wrought : on this foundation Christ meant to place the doctrine he came to teach them, their faith in which was an easy step, after once having a faith in his divine mission and power ; for if they had sufficient reason for believing that what he did was from God, they had the same reason for believing that what he taught was so too. They who saw and felt our Saviour's miracles, could be under no doubt of their reality, and, though they were people of low station, yet, as they had common sense, they could not mistake the rational conclusion, to which they pointed, and that they were a convincing proof of Christ's divine mission. — Learned men may dispute what are miracles, and what they prove ; but plain honest men, when they see the sick cured, and the dead raised, by a word's speaking, will, without hesitation, and surely without censure, impute that to the power of the Creator, which so much exceeds the power of all created beings, and which is in fact a fresh act of creation ; and, being convinced that the person who performs such works must be sent from God, will feel no difficulty in believing the doctrine he teaches to be divine.

In this manner did Christ exhibit his ministry, quite suitable to the great object and design of it, the spiritual salvation of man; his power in accomplishing which was naturally exhibited in the power which he shewed by his miracles over the health and preservation of the body. Christ placed himself among the lower conditions of mankind, where he might best meet with proper objects of the power he intended to manifest, as well as with the most unprejudiced, and, consequently, most attentive hearers of the doctrine he came to teach; and indeed where lay the natural and direct path to that death, which, according to his own and his father's will, it was ordained he should undergo for man's salvation.

How much more suitable was this appearance of the Messiah among mankind, than that which the Jews expected! It is true, they had mistaken the design of his coming, and therefore no wonder if they expected his appearance among them in a manner suitable to what they had conceived to be the design of it. The Jews had lost the independence of their state, and were oppressed with the Roman power. In this situation, when they
turned

turned to the prophecies which foretold the Messiah, their thoughts fastened eagerly on the descriptions they found of his power and the extent of his kingdom, which they hastily interpreted to be such a power and such a kingdom as they then severely felt the want of. Blinded with this persuasion, they saw not those prophecies which pointed at the true nature of the Messiah's kingdom, or those which described his state of humiliation; the former might escape them, but that they overlooked the latter was owing to their pride, or perhaps to their passionate desire of deliverance, which confined their attention principally, if not solely, to those prophecies which best agreed with what they most wanted. If some among them seem to have noticed the prophecies relating to Christ's humiliation, yet they knew not how to build their hopes on such unpromising ground.

But thus mistaken as they were in the real design of the Messiah's coming, and having formed their expectation of his appearing among them with temporal power and grandeur, they must needs despise the appearance which Jesus of Galilee made among them.

'Tis

'Tis true, his miracles astonished them ; — he might be sent from God ; but that he was sent for the deliverance of their state, and the destruction of the Roman power, they could not be persuaded ; — his family, his employment, and way of life, were circumstances which promised no such event. Where was his princely or military command ? or what connection between teaching the people and leading an army, between healing the sick and destroying their enemies ? — And had the Messiah's real design been the temporal deliverance and advancement of the Jews, they had thus reasoned not amiss. Their prejudices, from whence they reasoned, when considered by themselves, it must be owned had a fair appearance ; but when compared with the evidence Jesus gave of his divine mission, were not sufficient to justify either their keeping them or their reasoning from them. As the miracles of Jesus plainly proved his divine mission, they should have trusted to his power, as being sufficient for their hopes, however mean his appearance ; or, it should have led them to suspect they might be mistaken in what they expected from him.

But however opposite this appearance of
Christ

Christ might be to the expectations which the Jews had formed of the Messiah's coming for their temporal deliverance and advancement, it was quite agreeable to his own design of coming for the spiritual salvation of mankind. The miracles Christ wrought were a much stronger proof of such power, than all the circumstances of princely grandeur could have produced. His employment in curing the diseased, and raising the dead by his word, much better expressed the gracious purpose, as well as the divine authority, of his mission, than slaughter and conquest could have done; — exploits which the worst of men have often performed for the worst of purposes. Worldly splendor suits only weak and worldly purposes, and belongs only to such deliverers who save one part of mankind at the ruin of another, and then are not able to save themselves. Christ, who came to save the world, took not his splendor from the world, but brought it with him from heaven. Christ came — not to spill the blood of men, but to shed his own, for their recovery, not of earthly kingdoms, but of a heavenly one; and, as the gracious end of his coming was
to

to procure us life, and rescue us from death, so Christ set himself, not to earthly glory and conquest, but — to heal — to teach — to die, for our salvation.

This was the great design of Christ's coming, and these the gracious as well as astonishing works it produced ; — all naturally laid in the lowly station he chose, all naturally connected together, and all graciously connected to work the salvation of man. — His lowly station of life supplied opportunity for relieving the miserable ; his miraculous relief of the miserable recommended and authorised his teaching ; his teaching provoked the Jews — which wrought his death — and his death wrought our salvation. — It is our duty, not only to think of this with wonder and gratitude, but to comply with the purpose for which Christ condescended to undertake so great and good a work. As Christ came to cleanse us from our sins, we should apply ourselves to him with a sincere repentance of them, and a hearty faith in his salvation.

The hardened unrepenting sinner, who feels not his disease, as he cannot be expected to apply for a cure, so must expect to go without it ; but the repentant soul, however sinful, here sees
both

both direction and encouragement where to find it. The incurable leprosy vanished at the touch of Christ — so will the guilt and contagion of sin, incurable by any human means, drop from our souls, if we sincerely apply Christ's salvation to them. — Who then will not wish to be cured of his sin, that feels the misery of it? and who can be at a loss to find a cure, that remembers the leper's address, and our Saviour's reply to it? — "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." — "I will; be thou clean."

SERMON X.

A GOOD CHRISTIAN SUPERIOR TO THE
WORLD.

I JOHN V. 4.

*This is the victory that overcometh the world,
even our faith.*

A Good Christian is superior to the world; so far superior, that its temptations do not make him wicked, nor its troubles make him miserable: he may be sensible of both, but is neither drawn aside by the one, nor thrown down by the other.

The reason is, because, under a conscientious discharge of his duty, he fixes his faith on the promises of Christ; which have assured him, that this short state of human life shall be succeeded by an eternal one; in which, if he be careful not to disqualify himself

himself by a want of duty in the present life, he shall enjoy the highest happiness he is capable of receiving. This world, he sees, is full of troubles, and of very imperfect pleasures; but, whilst his faith shews him another, at no great distance, where trouble never comes, and where his happiness will be perfect, his attention to what he hopes for supports him under what he feels; he scorns the temptations of this life, when compared with the joys of heaven; and he patiently bears the troubles of it, persuaded as he is, that they will shortly have, not only an end, but a reward. This is common and right reasoning; we reason thus in the ordinary business and events of life; we set aside present pleasures for future advantages, and willingly undergo troubles in one part of our life, supported by the hopes of being rewarded for them in succeeding parts of it. The distance between the different parts of this life is not greater than the distance between this life and the next; but the reasoning is much stronger in the one case than in the other, as the happiness of the next life is much more sure, than any advantages we may propose to ourselves in the present.

However

However some may quarrel with faith, it is certainly true what the scripture says, that "we live by faith;" and that, not only in a religious, but in a natural sense, as we cannot take a step in the common business of the world without it. — If we cannot live without faith in one another, why may we not live by a faith in the promises of God? they surely are as good a foundation for our conduct in coming at the next world, as the promises of man are for our behaviour in the present.

Faith then, which, in the natural sense of the word, is so necessary for using the world: — in its religious sense, is a suitable means for overcoming it, i. e. for rendering us superior to whatever we find within it, by steadfastly looking at what lies beyond it.

The religious faith, which thus overcomes the world, is that faith, which the Christian revelation sets forth to us. It is this revelation, which shews us the work of God in the salvation of man by Jesus Christ; whose mission from God, whose transactions, precepts, and promises we are firmly to believe and obey, and fixing our love and devotion on him, to follow his guidance

through the duties of this life to the happiness of the next.

So important an object of our religious faith cannot be proposed to us, but upon proportionable evidence of its truth; God demands not our faith, without affording us sufficient reasons for believing; and in this most interesting point of faith, he hath afforded us the most convincing reasons for believing.

The great point, and the foundation of all, is, Jesus's mission from God in the character of his Son. Upon this depends the truth and importance of all that he either did or said; all which, if he truly came from God, and was truly the Son of God, must be stedfastly believed and obeyed. Jesus claimed this character; and made repeated declarations of it in the course of his preaching; yet this his own declaration of his character Jesus did not offer as a proof of it. — "If," says he, "I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true" — (is not a proper proof for your believing it to be true) "there is another that beareth witness of me, and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me, is true." The

The other, witness, to whom Jesus appeals, he expressly says, is God the Father. "The Father himself, which sent me, hath borne witness of me." Thus Jesus, we see, rests the proof of his mission and character upon the testimony of God; and, if this testimony be apparent, what more can be wanted for proving that Jesus is the Son of God? — This testimony is abundantly apparent in the records of holy scripture; where we find God himself declaring, by an audible voice from heaven, as well as by his inspired prophet John Baptist, that Jesus was his beloved son; and were the account of Jesus's death upon the cross, considered with its circumstances and consequences, it carries in it a divine testimony of his mission and character, that he was "Christ the Son of God." He died in testimony of this truth; — for when the high-priest adjured him to declare if he was the Christ the Son of God, he acknowledged it, and that acknowledgment immediately brought on his sentence; and with his dying words he again declared himself the Son of God, when he said — "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Thus Christ declared his mission

and character upon the cross; and God, by the miracles which attended his crucifixion, gave his testimony that the declaration was true — so strong, that it forced many to confess — “Truly this was the Son of God.”

But more fully still did God give his testimony for the truth of this declaration, when he raised Jesus from the dead. — What greater evidence can be conceived for the truth of Jesus's character, as Christ the Son of God, than that he died to declare it, and rose again to confirm it? — Yet there is more — for Jesus wrought all kinds of miracles in express attestation of his mission and character; — nor can we mistake, in applying this circumstance in Jesus's life as God's testimony to his character; since Jesus himself so often and so expressly appeals to it as such — “The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.” — This testimony of God no one can disbelieve, who has it set before him; and which we may be well assured is set before us in the records of Christ's gospel; the Divine authority and authenticity of which records are established on as full evidence, as the nature of the thing requires or admits, and on abundantly more

more evidence than can be produced for any other ancient records in the world.

This is enough to satisfy the reasonable mind, and to condemn the infidel; who, as St. John expresseth it, "maketh God a liar, because he believeth not the record which God gave of his Son."—I know not how an infidel may bear the reproach of so dreadful a guilt; but surely it belongs to him, when he disbelieves a record, of whose divine authority he has all reasonable evidence before him, if he will attend to it; for to disbelieve what we have reason to know God hath spoken, is surely the same thing as to disbelieve what we hear him speak; and, surely, every one has reason to know, who hath the means of knowing before him, however he may neglect or harden himself against such means.

The gospel, which contains the testimony of God to the mission and character of Jesus Christ, contains likewise the proposals God hath made for the salvation of mankind, and is the foundation, on which we set that faith, which makes us superior to the world we live in. God hath there promised us an eternal happy life after this; but he hath promised it through his Son Christ Jesus,

who died to satisfy divine justice for the sins of mankind, which else must have insuperably debarred them from happiness; whose merits, therefore, have procured us this promise — and our faith in him, and obedience to his precepts, are the condition, on which we are to expect the accomplishment of it.

With this promise before us, and a conscience within us, which entitles us to the accomplishment of it, there is nothing this world can shew us, of good or evil, but what looks little and transient; every thing here is so; and we are so much the happier, the more they appear so; but to make them appear so we must look at them, not through philosophy, but through the religion of Christ. Such deceive themselves, who pretend to despise the world, merely because the good it contains is transient and imperfect; for without the Christian religion, to shew them a greater good in the next world, what they meet with here is their greatest, and, imperfect as it is, is all they are like to meet with. But still more fatally do they deceive themselves under the evils of life, with the mere persuasion, that they are but of short continuance, when, without religion,

religion, and the salvation of Christ, they will be succeeded by worse evil of eternal duration. But if we embrace the proposals of salvation offered to us in the gospel, and, under the religion which Christ hath set us, honestly endeavour to fulfil the conditions of faith and obedience to him, we feel a sure ground, not for despising the good and evil belonging to the present life, which is no part of religion—but for not being overcome by either, which is the effect of it, arising from the sure prospect, which that gives us, of a happy life after this; — a prospect, which can only be had through the religion of Jesus Christ; whose merits alone have procured this inestimable blessing for mankind, and who freely offers it to all who will sincerely believe and obey him; — offers it; — consequently, wherever Christ's gospel is preached, men may either accept or reject it; or, if they do not reject, may neglect it, and not set themselves to live by it: — But, mark well the difference — “He who hath the Son” (they who accept the offers of the Son of God, and set themselves to live according to them) have his sure promise of “eternal life;” — but “he who hath not the Son” (they who reject his offers, or

do not set themselves to live according to them, but neglect what they profess to accept) whatever they have which may amuse them here, have nothing they can trust to hereafter; they may have their own word, that they shall be happy, but they have not God's word for it; — in short, they may have philosophy, but they have not eternal life: because they have not the means which God hath appointed for obtaining it.

We may, and we have reason to, think highly of the Divine goodness, wisdom, and mercy; and, if God had never given mankind a special revelation of his will, with respect to the method and terms of their salvation, we might have drawn as large conclusions from those attributes as we pleased; but, when God has expressly appointed a method, by which he has thought fit we should be saved, and laid down the terms, on which he will admit us to eternal life, we must think very strangely of the Divine perfections, if we can imagine; that, where these terms are offered, men may be saved without the application of this method, and be made happy on other terms than those which God hath appointed;

pointed; since this would be making the Divine appointment a mere useless matter, if salvation might be had as well without it, as with it.

They who have not the means, which God hath appointed for obtaining salvation (and they are such as reject the gospel; or who, though they profess their acceptance of it, pay no regard to it), cannot have the true means for rendering themselves superior to the world. — If this life was the whole of our being, philosophy, and a good temperament of constitution (which, however, is not every one's lot) might help us to manage, or to bear, what we meet with in it; — but there is another life to succeed the present; and nothing can afford us solid comfort in this life, but what will give us confidence in the next. The true method of living in this world, is to prepare ourselves for living in that which is to come; and this preparation is the work, not of philosophy, but of Christ's religion; — the former, few are acquainted with, though many pretend to it, who mistake their own and others' self-conceitedness for good sense; but the latter is within every one's reach, who lives under the gospel, and is not only the best sense, but

but is the easiest to come at—it is that, which should lead us through this life, because it is that, which must carry us into the next.—It is religion we must follow, which points at Christ and happiness; not philosophy, which shews us neither. In the discharge of our duty, what are the lifeless maxims of philosophy, in comparison with the precepts and promises of Christ? or, under the troubles of the world, what are the cold and barren speculations of the one, when compared with the joys of heaven, which the other sets before us?

To conclude.—The best assistance in duty, and the best comfort in trouble, is, happiness in view; which philosophy cannot shew us, much less can pride and empty self-conceit; but to which Christ's religion points out this plain and natural way—to please God—to obey his revealed will—and to follow that method of salvation, which he hath appointed who gave us our being, who gave us our religion, and who alone can give us happiness.

To whom, with the Son and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON

S E R M O N XI.

NEGLECT OF THE GOSPEL INGRATITUDE
TO GOD.

J E R E M I A H iii. 11.

*Backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than
treacherous Judah.*

I N the books of holy scripture we read the history of the Jews. A very extraordinary history it is, of a people separated and distinguished from the rest of mankind under a peculiar administration of government, in which God himself immediately presided over them as their king. In this history there is such a display of God's majesty, as well as condescension—such variety of events, in which we see his mercies and his judgments connected with the obedience or disobedience of that people—and at last such a wonderful dissipation of them over the whole earth—that it were little

little to say, the history of this people is not to be paralleled by the history of any people that ever lived in the world.

But we shall fall short of the purpose for which this history is recorded, and conveyed down to us with more authenticity than any other, if we read it only as a matter of curiosity and amusement. We cannot suppose, that God would thus, as it were, step down to govern a particular people for a few ages, merely to supply materials for a curious and wonderful history. We cannot suppose that God would do this merely for the sake of that people only; indeed we know, that God thus distinguished them, that they might carry his oracles of salvation, as well as exhibit an example of his governing providence, to all mankind.

Under the general example of God's governing providence, which the history of the Jewish people sets before us, are found particular lessons of moral and religious behaviour, which, though they be taken from national conduct, and may well be applied to national use, are yet applicable, personally and particularly, to each man's own private conduct and use as occasion serves. For, as the general conduct of nations moves by the same rules,

rules, and on the same principles, which usually direct the conduct of particular persons, so particular persons may draw examples from national conduct.

The history of the two kingdoms Israel and Judah, very strongly sets forth the duty of gratitude to God, as it shews the progress and fatal consequence of ingratitude towards him. We see God setting before them instructions of duty, with great encouragements for following them, by blessings in hand, and future promises. We see God sedulous in placing examples before them, to warn them of their danger from their disobedience — we see them careless and obstinate under these provisions, till at last — we see God just, and we see them miserable.

The ten tribes first revolted, and, separating themselves into the distinct kingdom of Israel, set up idolatry. From their revolt to their destruction the backslidings of Israel were constant and invariable. Her sins were not so much as chequered with virtue, nor her disobedience once interrupted by repentance. Judah's condition was better; she was prone to the same behaviour with her sister Israel, but not constant in it—open to temptation, yet open likewise to repentance; her idolatry

did not wholly swallow up her virtue. — Yet, after all this, even whilst the destruction of her sister Israel was before her, she grew worse and worse; God had favoured her with blessings, more than in proportion to her imperfect obedience, and the weight of his judgments had been, as yet, far less than the weight of her sins. She had owned God's authority, yet she disregarded it; she had renewed her engagements of duty, yet she transgressed. In this situation of the two kingdoms, when one of them was already brought to destruction by a hardened impiety, and the other was daily losing her sense of duty, and hastening on the same way — after repeated instances of God's favour, after her own repeated promises of obedience, and after the signal warning given her in her sister Israel's ruin — then it was, that God, by the mouth of his prophet, sent her this severe reproach — that “backsliding Israel had justified herself, more than treacherous Judah.”

That is — the offence of Israel was less heinous than the offence of Judah. Israel offended in the hardness of heart; Judah offended in opposition to better judgment, and the dictates of love and conscience. Israel had revolted, and felt the judgments of God;
I
Judah

Judah had felt his mercies, yet revolted. Israel was disobedient; but Judah broke through vows and promises to be so. Israel had thrown off her allegiance to God; Judah did that and more, she cast off her love of him. — Judah, therefore, was more ungrateful, more treacherous, and so was less justified, than backsliding Israel.

Let any of us now take this example of ingratitude towards God, and apply it to our own hearts, and try, if we do not feel ourselves concerned in it.

There are, God knows, too many among us, who are in Israel's condition, who have not God at all in their thoughts, who are "revolted and gone;" and who, like Israel, persist invariably in their bad courses without repentance, or even so much as reflection; under the sole influence of vice, with a hard

inflexible heart. But such are out of the present lesson before us; which was not directed to backsliding Israel, "revolted and gone," but to treacherous Judah, though not gone, yet falling. Nor, I trust, am I now speaking to any, who are hardened in bad courses, beyond all sense of religion and of virtue: — but, it may be, to such, who, under a proper

sense

sense of both, are however not so careful in a proper application of them as they should be. Such will do well to weigh maturely the judgment, which we here find passed on the kingdom of Judah, and to beware of that treachery in their conduct towards God, which he has declared to be more offensive to him, than even the obstinacy of impenitent sinners.

And well may it be so, if we consider how many ways we offend God, when we refuse him our obedience — in opposition to that sense and knowledge of our duty which he hath given us, and which we feel within us — in opposition to that authority he justly claims over us, and which we readily acknowledge — in opposition to his mercy, which daily saves us from miseries we have deserved — and in opposition to his goodness, which daily heaps blessings on us, which we have not deserved.

We cannot read the tender exhortations, which God sent, by his prophets, to the Jews, without feeling indignation at their obstinacy and ingratitude. And does not God exhortate as tenderly with us? Those exhortations were directed to them, not merely

as they were Jews, but as they were ungrateful sinners against a tender and merciful God; and the scriptures, in which they are contained, being recorded for the general use of mankind, those exhortations must be understood as directed to all, who come under that character. But whether we will choose to apply the words of God's prophets to ourselves or not, this is certain, that God's conduct towards us, without waiting for his words, is a constant and tender exhortation with us for our neglect of him—a severe reproach of our ingratitude.

There are none of us, but what, with a serious search into the heart, and around us, will discover such calls to duty, such blessings, such reasons for obedience, within our notice, as must make our disobedience great ingratitude to him, whose goodness and care hath set them before us. Besides the word of God in our hands, we have the Spirit, the voice of God in our hearts, as clearly as ever Judah heard it from the mouth of her prophets, pointing out to us our duty, urging, nay assisting us to pursue it. And whenever we step aside from it, we have this sacred prophet within us, to reproach and to recall us, whose dictates and whose menaces are ever

supported and enforced by God's express declarations in the sacred volumes of his will.

Besides these faculties, which, being the endowment of rational creatures, are common to all men, how are we blest, in different degrees, with advantages which improve and facilitate the use of them! Some have larger and stronger understandings, more improved wisdom and knowledge, quicker parts of discernment, and sounder judgment, with a more lively relish of virtue. — Are not these blessings, which we feel within us, which God indeed hath dispensed with variety to different persons, but which, in whatever degree he dispenses them, are proportionably greater calls for knowing and obeying him, and will proportionably heighten the ingratitude of our ignorance and disobedience? If we look farther down within us, we discover still more blessings, more reasons for our obedience, the neglect of which will raise our ingratitude still higher. We discover proofs of God's mercy, as well as goodness — that he hath not only greatly endowed us, but hath also greatly spared us. For we must discover, that we have been sinners against him; and every reflection that sets our own sins before us, by which we have incurred the displeasure of

of God, sets his mercies also before us, which have spared us from feeling it. — Add to this, those secret vows and resolutions of obedience, so often repeated, and as often broken, which such reflection ever brings along with it, and which makes us not only feel, but wonder at, his mercy.

If we look without us, what do we see but blessings; what but encouragements to obedience, and warnings against disobedience, all around? The blessings of our creation, of our daily preservation, and of our intendment for eternal happiness, through Christ's redemption, are general blessings, in which all are concerned, which no serious Christian can overlook, and which he cannot seriously look into, but he must own it to be the highest madness, mixed with the deepest ingratitude, not to love and to obey the purposes of God, who created us for happiness, and, in order to that end, supplies us with temporal blessings here, and promises us eternal blessings hereafter.

Besides these general blessings, there are none of us who have not shared, and I hope there are few who are not sensible of it, particular blessings from the hand of God. I am sure, when we reflect on our condition as Chris-

tians, and on our particular situation as Christians of this church, we must be sensible we want not as clear direction in the knowledge of our duty, — we want not as signal blessings to encourage us in the performance of it, — we want not as plain examples to deter us from neglecting it, as ever Judah had. As particulars — though all have not the blessings they may wish for, yet who shall say, he does not meet with those that are fittest for him? — But, farther still, who will lay his hand to his heart and say, he has not more than, his obedience considered, he deserves? After all the objections that can be raised from the unequal dispensation of the gifts of Providence through the bulk of mankind, let each of us but descend, with an impartial search, into our own consciences and experience, and we shall find enough to prove the goodness of God in caring for us, and consequently enough for charging ourselves with ingratitude in neglecting him, and the duty we owe him.

Lastly, for discouragements against neglecting him, whom we ought to love, God has plentifully supplied every path in human life with examples of the mischief which attends it. For though there may be more instances

of vice, than there are of those who are apparently miserable under it, yet there is no vice to tempt the heart of man, without there being examples within his notice to point out the mischievous consequences attending it. We are in Judah's situation, and see instances of destruction in those paths which we may be inclined to pursue. Fatal instances they are of judgment to those who fall by them, but they are gracious instances of mercy to such as see them. 'Tis idle, therefore, not to say wicked, to ask, how God can in justice punish some sinners and spare others? — God's judgments, as well as mercies, proceed from goodness conducted by wisdom; and if he punishes some sinners, in order to save others, it is a conduct, which even human wisdom may well approve, it is a conduct for which divine wisdom may have farther reasons than we can see; but this is certain, it is a conduct which enhances the goodness of God towards those, who are thus shewn what they may avoid—and which will enhance the ingratitude of those, who, like the treacherous Judah, are shewn such warnings, yet will not be taught to fear them.

Let us all then beware of ingratitude to God.
Let us reflect how we are placed — under the
L 3 highest

highest light of instruction in the knowledge of our duty — surrounded with the daily blessings of Providence, as well as particular instances of his goodness, to encourage our obedience, and with daily examples to warn us from disobedience — supported too by the assistance of his Holy Spirit, and the prospect of eternal happiness. — Under these advantages and these blessings, to live a careless and wicked life, carries in it much more than the simple offence of neglecting virtue and choosing vice. — It is the complicated, accumulative crime of treachery to our own engagements — ingratitude to God's goodness — contempt of his mercies — and defiance of his justice. — It was this, which made treacherous Judah less justified than backsliding Israel — and this will make more treacherous Christians still far less justified than she.

S E R M O N XII.

THE SERVITUDE OF SIN.

GALATIANS iv. 7.

Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

ST. Paul frequently calls the religious state of the Jews a state of bondage. Yet, the true God was the object of their religion, and the external ceremonies attending it were of God's appointment; — this was religious service to God, and his service is perfect freedom.

But the ceremonies attending the religion of the Jews were appointed by God, not for their intrinsic worth, but as a means to prefigure and introduce the revelation and religion of Christ; in this view the Jewish religion itself was a servant to the religion of

Christ, consequently they who lived under that religion must be servants too.

The service of God is freedom, as it frees us from a slavery to such other powers as would ruin us; and when God appointed the ceremonial of the Jewish religion, and they observed it, their obedience to God's appointments kept them from the slavery of idolatry;—and this was freedom; but yet their employment in ceremonies, which were intended to be subservient to higher purposes, was, with respect to those purposes, a state of bondage.

When Christ came and fulfilled what the ceremonial of the Jewish religion had prefigured, the end for which that ceremonial was appointed was answered, and the law on which it stood fell into desuetude; there was an end of employment in ceremonies, but the duty of obedience to God's appointments still remained; there was the same obligation for attending to God's appointment of Christ for the completion of the ceremonial law, as there was for attending to his appointment of the ceremonial law itself; and true religion, which is obedience to God's will, still continued the same in substance, though varied in circumstance; the object of it hitherto had been,

been, God and his ceremonies — now it was, God and his Christ.

Upon this alteration of the case, St. Paul saith of the Jew, “Thou art no more a servant,” that is, thou art no longer in bondage to the observance of the ceremonial law. This is obvious enough. The apostle adds — “but a son” — which does not immediately follow from not being a servant, but from something else, which the apostle sets forth, immediately before the text: — “When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

The end of Christ's coming was to render mankind acceptable to God; and this state of acceptance with God was truly making them sons of God. The sons of God they were by creation; but that title was forfeited by disobedience, which cancelled their right to God's paternal love, and exposed them to his judicial anger; which being pacified by Christ's mediation, they recovered their right to God's paternal love, and again became his sons by adoption, that is, by God's free acceptance

ceptance of them as such, through the merits of Christ.

The Jews were trained up, under the discipline of their law, for this adoption, which, at the coming of Christ, was proposed to all mankind, who thereby, as well as the Jews, were no longer servants but sons; — for servants they were, though not to ceremonies, yet to sin; from which the mediation of Christ sets us free, if we accept it, upon the terms proposed, of faith and repentance; — we are then no more servants to sin, but sons of God through Christ.

Christ, by the atonement he hath made, hath freed us from the guilt and punishment of sin, and by his gospel and assisting grace puts us in the way of freeing ourselves from the practice of it; and it must be by our application of the latter, that we come at the benefit of the former: — that we may be truly no more servants to sin, we must truly be servants of God; and, being his sons, must shew the obedience of sons here — in consequence of which only we shall hereafter be heirs of his happiness through Christ.

St. Paul is frequent and strong in his declarations on the servitude of sin, and the liberty in

in being sons of God; and whoever has resolution of trying the experiment, in the apostle's full meaning, will find their own experience equal to his expressions. There is no greater servitude than a sinful life, nor a happier liberty than what is enjoyed in a good and religious one. Wicked men cannot be sensible of the latter, because they are not good and religious; but they may be sensible of the former, even whilst they are enjoying the pleasures of sin, but especially when they grow weary in their pursuit of them, and most especially when, upon a change of life, they look back upon what they have been, and have an opportunity of comparing, upon their own experience, a wicked life with a good one. They can then remember how their sinful practices cramped their understanding, and corrupted their judgment, and will own (what they were not totally without feeling before), that there is at least as much uneasiness as pleasure in being wicked, and nothing but gall and wormwood in the reflection of having been so; — whilst, in their present happy change of life, they feel their understanding more free and active, forming more true judgment of things, and directing a will less depraved, and of course more compliant

pliant with what is right. — They find (what they would not believe before), that there is pleasure in being good, and happiness in the reflection of having been so.

I had rather leave this topic to your own thoughts and experience, than employ description upon it; — where there is common sense and observation, description is unnecessary; where there is not, it is useless.

But this is not all. — It is not merely the pleasure in being good, or the happiness in reflecting that we have been so, that influences our conduct in leading a Christian life; — it is not merely the consideration, that we are no longer servants of sin (though that is much), which should encourage and direct our behaviour; — we are, in consequence of such duty, the “sons of God, and if sons, then heirs of “God through Christ.”

The fatigue attending a sinful life, and the painful consequences that follow it, are natural discouragements from pursuing it; to which if we add the odious character we bear in such pursuit, of being servants to the devil (for “his servants we are whom we obey”), it should make us not only avoid but detest it. — As, on the other hand, the glorious character of being sons of God, and the expectation
annexed

annexed to that character, not only prompts us to detest a wicked life, as unbecoming our dignity, and destructive of true freedom and happiness here, but animates us in the course of a good life by the prospect of heaven for our possession hereafter.

For there lies our estate, as "sons and heirs of God through Christ." Where if we fix our attention and aim, not only the temptations of sin, but even the reasonable enjoyments of the world, will lose their hold upon us; — the former we shall hate, the latter we shall not love. This is the true freedom we should feel, as sons of God; a freedom not only from sin, but from such worldly affections as may obstruct our contemplation on the happy state intended for us, and which, the shortness and uncertainty of life considered, we are just ready, if we are but fit, to enter upon.

Such contemplation, and the disposition of mind and behaviour which it produces, is no hinderance to the necessary duties of life, but promotes them. — He is a better citizen, who thinks of the next world, than he who thinks only of the present — nor is it any hinderance to the reasonable enjoyments of this life, to which he needs not be a stranger, who prefers,

prefers, and prepares himself for, the happiness of another; for it is not worldly good, but worldly affections, that are inconsistent with heaven — and so they are with true freedom, and peace of mind, upon earth. Providence hath so constituted this human system, through which he hath appointed us to pass on to a better — hath so blended good and evil together, and set distaste to wait upon enjoyment — that, on whatever objects we fasten our affections, we feel as much uneasiness as pleasure from them. This shews that our affections should be fixed elsewhere; and God hath shewed us where to fix them — on objects hereafter — which will not fail, and which will satisfy us: and they who do fix their attention there will not feel themselves miserable, though their attention to inferior objects be interrupted or disappointed; but will enjoy that freedom, which belongs to the sons of God, and to which they are strangers, who are slaves to their worldly affections; and, being so, are hard wrought with the numberless anxieties, if not vices, which meet them, not only in the pursuit, but in the gratification, of them.

A freedom from these is liberty — liberty well worth acquiring — and which the Christian religion,

religion, well heeded, and well followed, will procure us. The thing is highly valuable, but the name is much abused; and it is even pitiable to see, at this time of the gospel, and in this country, which has so long and so fully enjoyed it — it is, I say, pitiable to see, as we do, such a depraved enthusiasm for what is called liberty, not only in preference to what is true liberty, but for that which is totally destructive of it — for that which leads to the worst sort of slavery, a slavery to other men's passions as well as our own, and to every vice, which both may suggest for the disturbance of society. The liberty, to which the gospel of Christ calls us, is freedom from sin, and a title to happiness; the call for liberty, which so often and so loudly assaults our ears in these times, leads to mischief and confusion, and is slavery to sin; — for those hazard every virtue they may wish to keep, in standing forth for a liberty of doing whatever mischief themselves or others may propose; as, on the other hand, those acquire more virtues than they are aware of, who maintain their freedom from such attachments, and adhere strictly to the duties which Christ and his religion has set before them: — the one may hereafter find into what slavery they are betrayed by their affected title

of

of patriots, and whose agents they have been in working mischief and disquiet to their country; the other will find, that the liberty, in which they have maintained their title, as sons of God here, shall lead them to the inheritance of his sons in the kingdom of heaven.

SERMON

THE VALUE OF MY THING PROPERLY RAISES
 OUR ATTENTION AND CARE TO PRESERVE IT; AND TO
 GREAT IS THE VALUE OF A CHRISTIAN FAITH, THAT
 THE SPOKE OF IT, BEING IN HIS STYLE
 TO BELOVE IT; AND YET TO EXCEEDING RICH

S E R M O N XIII.

OUR INTEREST IN HEAVEN THROUGH
 CHRIST.

THE FIRST OF THE THREE
 PARTS, THAT THE STRENGTH OF LANGUAGE UNKS
 UNDER THEM, AND BE BEGS OF GOD, THAT HE
 WOULD GIVE THEM THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND RE-
 RELATION. **EPHESIANS ii. 4, 5, 6.**

*God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love
 wherewith he loved us, even when we were
 dead in sins, hath quickened us together with
 Christ, and hath raised us up, and made us sit
 together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*

ST. Paul in this epistle congratulates the
 Ephesians on their faith in Christ, and,
 which is the spirit of all his congratulations,
 he on this account tells them how much they
 are the subject of his constant prayers to God;
 to whom he gives his sincere thanks for this
 blessing conferred upon them, and makes it
 his no less sincere request, that they may go
 on to improve under it, and be fully sensible
 of the riches it contains.

The value of any thing proportionably raises our attention and care to preserve it; and so great is the value of a Christian faith, that the apostle industriously strengthens his style to describe it; and yet so exceeding rich and glorious are the objects, which present themselves to the apostle's mind, and which he is desirous to set before the minds of the Ephesians, that the strength of language sinks under them, and he begs of God, that he would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation, and enlighten their understanding in discerning them.

And what are these objects? — They are — a knowledge of God, and of Christ — inheritance with the saints in heaven — the exceeding greatness, the working, of God's mighty power for our sakes, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, to be the head over all things to the church — the fulness of him, who filleth all in all.

A faith, which presents such a scene to our view, has surely rich contents. — Besides which, other wonder demands our attention; — for the apostle tells us, that the same working of God's power and love towards

wards man, which raised Christ from the dead, and set him at his right hand for our sakes, hath also quickened us sinners, hath raised us to life together with Christ, and made us fit together with him in heavenly places.

Christ's resurrection is a declaration and proof of our own;—not that these two events are naturally connected; for, merely because Christ rose, it does not necessarily follow, that we shall rise. But a reason may be assigned, which makes our resurrection a consequence of Christ's resurrection. Such reason there is; and it is drawn from the appointment and declaration of God. God has appointed the man Christ Jesus, as the author of our restoration to a life after this; and Christ Jesus has declared this to be the business of his coming among us, and, to confirm such declaration, has himself rose from the dead. We see from hence that our resurrection is a sure, though it be not a natural, consequence of Christ's resurrection. St. Paul says — “if Christ be not risen, then *“is our preaching vain;”* — which implies, that, if Christ be risen, his preaching is pertinent and true; and yet it would not be so,

if the resurrection of man was not a sure consequence of Christ's resurrection. — St. Paul's doctrine would be equally vain, whether Christ be not risen, or whether man be not to rise.

But farther. — As we are raised together with Christ, by virtue of his resurrection; so, by virtue of his ascension, we are "made to sit together with him in heavenly places."

This important privilege hath a double aspect, and respects both our present and our future state. Christ is our head, our representative; in this character he rose from the grave, and in this character he ascended up to heaven. If our representative be in heaven, we who are represented are virtually there, though still living upon earth. Christ is gone up in our nature; and, as he is there, not only our representative, but our mediator and advocate with the Father, we have an interest there, though our present being is here. On these considerations alone it is no strain of language to say, we are together with Christ in heaven, nor any strain of religion to think so. On the contrary, it is a thought most naturally adapted for animating our religion, and producing such behaviour in us as should be the fruits of it.

But.

But our sitting together with Christ in heavenly places, doubtless, respects not only our present state and privilege, but, principally, our future condition and reward. As Christ's resurrection is a declaration and proof of our own, so Christ's ascension into heaven is an assurance that we shall ascend thither — such an assurance, that the apostle expresses it as done, rather than intended, and says *we are made*, instead of *we shall be made*, to sit with him; because the intention and declaration of God are sure. — Thus our sitting together with Christ in heaven respects both our present and our future state; — we are there already in Christ, as he is our head, and the sure ground of our hope; and we shall hereafter be there through Christ, as the author of our advancement, when we shall no longer hope for, but shall enjoy, his presence.

Thus much for an explanation of the apostle's expression in my text. — We are properly said to be raised up together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, because, during this life, we have an interest in him, seated as he is in our nature, our representative, mediator, and advocate — and because, in the next life, we shall, if we deserve

it, assuredly be taken up to sit with him for ever.

For what remains to be said, your own reflections will easily go before me, in suggesting the proper and practical use of this important lesson. For, persuaded as we are that we have, during the present life, such an interest in heaven, and so glorious a destination there in future, we cannot but feel the obligation we are under of applying the one and preparing ourselves for the other—and of fixing our affections there, from whence we derive our truest comfort, and where we are to enjoy our truest happiness.

When we consider this provision which God hath made for our being good and happy, we must think ourselves inexcusable in neglecting it. Every minute of our lives we can, by an act of the mind, quit this earth, and in contemplation ascend to where Christ sitteth in heaven at the right hand of God—where he is ready to receive and prefer our petitions to the Father—where he sits our mediator and advocate with him for pardon and grace.—There we may confer with him, who knows, not only our wants, but our feelings too;—being himself man, he knows how to pity and assist men. This interest in
heaven

heaven 'tis pity any should neglect, because all, the very best of men, have need of it. We have all daily need of pardon and of grace, if not for sins notoriously such, yet for such frailties and imperfections of the soul, which, though the world sees them not, the good man feels and laments. These, was there no recourse appointed for the management of them, might be left to the mercy of God; but when Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, and not only permits but commands us to have recourse to him with our frailties, the good man will not think them unworthy his notice, but will immediately have recourse to Christ, who can both pardon and remove them.

Good men will have frequent need of this application. They may not have their spirits equally vigilant, and equally strong at all times, and on all occasions — they may fail where they have before succeeded — and whilst they are intent to secure one virtue, may leave another unguarded. Nor should this discourage them. Imperfection is our unavoidable condition here; but there is this advantage arising from it, that it makes us have frequent recourse to Christ; it reminds us of our interest in heaven, when we so often feel

we want it; nor is this interest of such perishable nature as to waste by use—the more we use it, the stronger it is.

Thus the good Christian finds himself raised up to be in heaven with Christ, when in devout contemplation and prayer he directs his faith towards him, as his mediator and advocate, and applies for that pardon and assisting grace, which he is ever wanting for the direction and support of his conduct; and, in habituating himself to such piety, he not only applies his present interest in heaven, but is preparing himself for his future destination there. The more we frequent heaven in hope, the greater will be our fruition of it, when we arrive there. For the happiness of heaven is not like what we call happiness on earth, which is generally less in possession, than in expectation; for happiness depends upon our faculties; and, the faculties of sense being less extensive than the faculties of the mind, it may well be that we imagine more than we actually feel of sensual happiness, which is mostly what we call happiness here; but the happiness of heaven will be spiritual, and the more the faculties of the mind are improved and enlarged by being employed, the more it will relish, because it will be more adapted

for such happiness; — but then, the faculties of the mind, under its greatest improvement, being inferior to the power of God, the happiness of heaven must needs be greater than our expectation.

In the mean time, by frequenting heaven to study our hopes there, and by improving and enlarging the faculties of the soul, though we cannot at present extend them to the measure of those joys which shall hereafter be set before us, we shall however make them too extensive and too noble to be gratified by the objects of this world; and so far at least we shall get prepared for the future happiness of heaven, as we have laid aside a love for the enjoyments upon earth, which are our greatest hinderance in attaining heaven, and would spoil our relish of it, were we allowed to try it.

Think what it is, to be brought where we shall know God in his nature, as here we know him in his works! — to contemplate the whole system of his providence, and the workings of his almighty power, wisdom, and goodness! — Think what it is, to see our Redeemer in our nature, with the inheritance of saints around him! — Think what it is, to sit in this glorious assembly, and feel the approbation of God and of our Redeemer! — Think what

what is, to see this glorious assembly united with God, with Christ, and with each other, under the most exalted love, knowledge, and harmony—and this to all eternity!—This earth, indeed, will then be passed away;—or, were it not, would we, from such a scene, deign to look down upon it?

A scene, which is not mere imagination, such as the mind works, without truth, without authority for its work—it is the work of God, the declaration of scripture; which, though it does not particularly describe the future state of the blessed, yet, not only permits, but commands us to think, and that attentively, on its general declarations.

Hope and fruition are distinct things, though one leads to the other. Hope carries us through duty—fruition gives us our reward. The scriptures are set before us to supply us with the former, heaven will hereafter supply us with the latter. The scriptures particularly describe what we should be here; and if they do not particularly describe what we shall be hereafter, it is because the former is necessary to duty, the latter is not necessary to our reward.—Duty must be exactly known, in order to be performed; but the particular

particular nature of a reward need not to be known in order to be merited.

General declarations of our reward the scriptures set before us — these are sufficient foundation for hope, which is sufficient foundation for duty. — On these we are to look — on these we are to think — and on this ground the mind may go to work with the best and highest thoughts it can produce ; — under this discouragement, indeed, that the strongest operation of thought, with its richest materials, cannot lead us to imagine what we shall then experience ; — but with this advantage, however, that the more and the higher we accustom ourselves to think on this, the most important of all subjects, the better effect it will work on our behaviour, and make us the more careful not to lose — a happiness too great to be imagined and described.

SERMON XIV.

THE CONQUERING WORLDLY AFFECTIONS
IS BEING BORN OF GOD.

I JOHN V. 4.

Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world.

THE points of enquiry, which naturally arise here, are these two; — what it is to be born of God — and, what it is to overcome the world.

To be born, is to receive the principles of life. Thus, we are born of our parents, from whom we receive the principles of our natural life; and this expression of being born, which belongs to our first change of state, when we come out of darkness into life, is frequently and fitly applied in scripture to such future change as may be made in our condition,

tion, when we come out of sin into righteousness; and, as the former is called our *natural birth*, so the latter is called our *spiritual birth*, and our *new birth*, as the former is *generation*, or being born, so the latter is called *regeneration*, or being born again.

Now, as we derive our natural birth from our parents, so scripture assures us, that we derive our spiritual birth from God. — We derive indeed our natural birth from God, through the instrumentality of our parents; as we derive our spiritual birth from him, through the instrumentality of those means, which he hath appointed for conferring the special influence of his Spirit on our minds; by the power of which we are, at any time, awakened from a sinful, to choose and persist in a good life. And as, in consequence of our natural birth, we are the sons of our parents, so, in consequence of such spiritual birth, the scripture calls us sons of God.

But farther. — With the principles of life is implanted in us a love of those, of whom we are born. This circumstance, so strongly connected with our natural birth, must needs be found applicable to our spiritual birth, and is applied accordingly; — for as he who is born of his parents loveth his parents, so he
I who

who is born of God loveth God. Now the love we feel for our parents not only operates by an inward tendency of heart towards them, beyond all other objects, but outwardly shews itself in a resemblance of disposition and conduct; and, still more expressly, in a ready obedience to their commands, and to whatever we know is agreeable to them. — This circumstance too is carried into the description of our spiritual birth, and scripture expressly tells us, that, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.”

Thus are we born of God; thus are we the sons of God. — Not that we are so merely, and only by the first impression of reformation and righteousness made on our hearts, but by a continued course in it. The true sons of God, the truly regenerate, are those who have not only resolved to forsake sin and live a good life, but continue so to do. In the case of our natural birth, indeed, it is true, that, in consequence of the single act of being born, we are always the sons of our parents, behave as we will; — yet even there, disobedience, though it takes not away the name, may deprive us of the privileges belonging to it; but, in the case of our spiritual birth, our disobedience deprives us of both.

We

We are born of God, then, when, by the influence of God's Spirit in our hearts, having forsaken sin, and undertaken a good life, we persevere in it, with a sincere love of him and obedience to his commands.

Now that which supplies us with the means, and motives, for doing this is a faith in Christ. That is the means, which God hath appointed, through which he conveys that grace into our hearts, by which we first feel ourselves moved from sin towards righteousness, and by which we are afterwards supported in it. A faith in Christ's blessings and promises prompts us to a love of God, and him, and encourages our obedience; so that, because it is through a faith in Christ that we are born of God, therefore, to *have faith in Christ*, and to be *born of God*, are expressions, used in scripture, as signifying the same thing; and *both* are applicable to those who, believing Jesus Christ to be, what the gospel represents him, have, by the grace of God, through Christ, forsaken sin to pursue righteousness, and, using their best endeavours for persevering in it, do feel a trust in the promises of the gospel, with a sincere obedience to the precepts of it, and as sincere a love for Christ, who hath set them both before
us.

'us.'—This then is to be born of God; which, in short, is to lead a truly good and Christian life. —And this it is which "overcometh the world;" — which is our second point of enquiry.

The expression of overcoming the world implies, that the world is in a state of enmity with us; — and so it is; — and if we recollect in what respects we feel the enmity of the world, that will shew us what is meant by overcoming it.

The pleasures and the troubles of the world are, both, our enemies; troubles destroy our happiness here, and pleasures, if not carefully used, destroy our happiness hereafter. Those who have resolved on a good life, and persevere in it, feel themselves guarded against both these enemies. Their love of Christ and his religion, secures them from being attached to the pleasures of the world, and their trust in his promises enables them to bear the troubles of it with constancy.

I say, a love of Christ and his religion; — for so long as we look upon religion as a task, it is with much awkwardness, and little success, that we set ourselves to oppose, either the pleasures or the troubles of the world. Under such a disposition men may comply with the outward work of religion; they may

say their prayers, go to church, and both speak and think reverently of Christ's gospel. A regard for the opinion of men may put them upon this; and this will satisfy the world;—but this will not overcome the world; and we see many of this sort, who, notwithstanding such religion, are held fast to the vanities and pleasures of the world, and when troubles arise are confounded with them. It is a love of religion that must counteract both a love and a fear of the world; for we cannot set aside the pleasures of the world, till we feel a superior pleasure from religion; and the troubles of the world will sit the heavier upon us, if that, to which we have recourse under them, affords us no pleasure to balance against them.

This then is the point we are to aim at, to make religion our delight. So David describes the good man, as one, that not only “walk-
 “eth not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor
 “standeth in the way of sinners, but, whose
 “delight is in the law of the Lord, and in
 “his law doth he exercise himself day and
 “night.” The frame and temper of our minds must be religious; in order to which, we must exercise ourselves in a frequent contemplation and attention to the important
 2 matters,

matters, which Christ's gospel sets before us, till we take true pleasure in the work — till we feel a love for religion in our hearts, and, in consequence of that, a love for him who hath planted it there. It is then only that religion takes effect in us, as it is then only that it is true religion; for till we arrive at this, however we may flatter ourselves with the performance of the outward works of religion, we are short of its true work. Our prayers and our public worship are doubtless most necessary and most useful duties; and as they naturally proceed from a heart that is truly religious, so they as naturally operate towards making it so. Yet they are but means, and we must not mistake the means of religion, for religion itself; the consequence of which is, that when trial arises, our religion, as we call it, is not a match either for the pleasures or the troubles of life.

But when the means of religion have led us up to religion itself, and we feel it seated in our heart on a sincere love of Christ, and trust in his promises, then it is that we are superior both to the pleasures and troubles of the world — in this sense superior to them, that they cannot interrupt our Christian conduct, or spoil us of that obedience, and that hope, on

which depend our comfort here and our happiness hereafter. It is not to be expected, that a good and religious life should set us absolutely out of the reach of the pleasures and troubles of the world. Experience shews, that good men are not exempted from the troubles of life; nor does either reason or religion totally debar them from the pleasures of it; — but a good and religious life, as it withholds us from the sinful pleasures of the world, so it hinders the innocent ones from engrossing our affections; and, as it helps us to avoid many of the troubles belonging to the world, so it enables us to bear, with constancy and comfort, what we cannot avoid.

This is the victory which the good Christian gains over the world, and this victory he gains by feeling a love for Christ and his precepts, and a trust in his promises. — As to the vicious pleasures of the world, they have no temptation for a heart which is already filled with religious hope; they cease to be pleasures; and good men reject them for the same reason that bad men reject religion — because they do not delight in them; — with this advantage however on their side, and a very considerable advantage it is, that good men, in rejecting the vicious pleasures of the world,
reject

reject not only what they dislike, but what they ought to reject; whereas bad men, when they reject religion, reject what they ought to embrace. So that there is this material difference between the two cases — that good men, when they reject the vicious pleasures of the world, not only gratify their taste, but satisfy their conscience; but bad men, when they reject religion, gratify their taste indeed, but at the expence of their conscience.

The same principles, which withhold good men from the sinful pleasures of the world, hinder even the innocent ones from engrossing their affections.

The main circumstance, which gives the pleasures of the world their force of allure-ment, is, that they are present; as, on the other hand, the happiness of the next world loses its due weight with us by being absent:—no man would prefer the pleasures of the world to the happiness of heaven, if he might as soon lay hold of the one as he can of the other. Religion sets the happiness of the next life nearer—within our view; and, by so doing, abates the allurements of the pleasures belonging to the present, and withholds us from setting our affections on them; for the more we think of superior happiness, the less

we regard inferior pleasures. Now, when we consider how short human life is, even in its greatest extent—how uncertain we all are whether we shall live to that extent, nay, how uncertain it is whether we shall be allowed the very next moment's step in our progress towards it—and how certainly the accomplishment of Christ's purposes and promises will take place;—when, I say, we have these considerations before us, do they not set the happiness of the next world at our very doors?—And then—where are the enjoyments of the present world, that shall claim a preference in our affection?

Enjoyments there are, no doubt, belonging to this world, which claim our gratitude to God, who has set them before us, as a relief in our pilgrimage through life;—and it is so far from being true, that good men are debarred such enjoyments, that, perhaps, if the account was rightly taken, they have more of them than other men—at least they relish what are set before them with a higher satisfaction;—for enjoyments, that are not inconsistent with goodness, are always improved by meeting with it.

But here lies the point of care in this matter—that, whilst we have these pleasures before

Before us, we should be ever looking beyond them; — we should consider, we can enjoy them but a little while at most; and, in the mean time, however agreeable or useful they may be for the purposes of this life, they are mere trifles when compared with the happiness of the next. This should not only withhold us from fixing our affections on them, but should make us cautious in our use of them, lest we forfeit his favour who sets them before us, and so by abusing our enjoyments we should lose our happiness.

This disposition, and the conduct it produces, not only secures us the happiness of the next life, but helps us to avoid many of the troubles belonging to the present — most of which arise from doting on worldly enjoyments, or from abusing them; the former is a sure foundation for misery in the disturbance or loss of them, and the latter as surely brings both vice and mischief along with it. But if we be careful not to dote on our worldly enjoyments, we are prepared for the loss of them; and if we be careful not to abuse them, we avoid, at least, those troubles which arise from such abuse.

And for those troubles which the wisdom of God, not our own folly, sets before us, the

leading a good life will most surely enable us to bear them with constancy, and, I may well add, with comfort. For, when we have all along maintained a sincere faith in Christ, have loved him, have taken delight in his commands—can we think he will forsake us, and leave us without comfort under afflictions which his own hand hath laid upon us? — Only let us not be wanting in our love and duty to Christ before afflictions come, and he will not be wanting in his love and comfort when they fall upon us. We shall feel comfort—from his grace in our hearts—from the reflections of a good conscience—and, from an attention and trust in his promises. The same considerations, by which our faith has kept us from being enslaved to the pleasures of the world, will support us from being overwhelmed with the afflictions of it; and what diminished the allurements of the former, will help much to abate the severities of the latter;—they can be but of short duration, and eternal happiness lies close behind them.—As this consideration, when applied to the enjoyments of the world, withholds us from fixing our affections on them—when applied to its troubles, it withholds us from despairing under them. It improves every little instance of
comfort,

comfort, which the love and piety of others may administer to us — it smooths the passions — fortifies the heart — and brings us not only to submit, but to submit with chearfulness; lest we shew ourselves refractory to his will, who hath set the afflictions of this world, as well as the happiness of the next, before us, and appoints us the like, but less rugged path, to come at our happiness, which his own Son, our Redeemer, trod, to come at his glory and our salvation.

God knows us better than we know ourselves; and better sees, than we can, which is our surest path to happiness — whether through the enjoyments or through the troubles of life. If he appoints the latter, we may be assured that, however rugged the way may be, it is the right way, and the same hand which puts us in it, will support us in it, if we will follow and rely upon him:—the good Christian follows it with chearfulness; and, under the same guidance, which led the holy children through the fiery furnace unscorched, he walks steady and superior through afflictions — because God and his Redeemer are his support, and “his heart is fixed, where true joys are
“to be found.”

common, which the love and pity of others
may administer to us — it is important to us
— to cherish the heart — and things are not only
to be done but to be done with cheerfulness;
lest we show ourselves unworthy to his will,
who hath set the afflictions of this world, as
well as the happiness of the next, before us,
and appointed us the first, but his blessed will
to come at our happiness, which is the only
our Redeemer, and to come at his glory and
our advancement.
— God knows us better than we know our-
selves; and better than that we can, which
is our worst path to happiness — whether
through the enjoyment of things, or the trou-
bles of life. If he had not in his hand, we may be
assured that, however rugged the way may be,
it is the right way, and the way which
leads us to it, will appear as it is, and we will
follow and obey him — he is God, Christian
follows it with a true heart, and under the
true guidance, which led the holy children
through the fire to the land of promise, how else
could they have been so happy? —
And, and lastly, through afflictions —
And, God and his Redeemer are his happy
and his heart is fixed, whose true joys are
to be found.

SERMON XV.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE
PASSIONS.

PROVERBS XXV. 28.

*He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like
a city that is broken down, and without
walls.*

BY the word *spirit* is here meant what we commonly call the passions; and the plain lesson, which Solomon gives us, is—that we ought to govern our passions.

This lesson he enforces by pointing at the disorder, to which we are exposed by not governing them. Indeed, almost all the mischiefs we see in the world arise from this cause; and therefore the government of our passions is a duty, which common prudence should prompt us to observe, if we desire to
live

live quietly and safely : but we have a higher motive to this duty, and a higher end proposed to it, from the holy religion we profess ; it is the command of Christ's gospel, that denying worldly lusts, and mortifying our corrupt affections, we should live soberly and godly in this present world.

The passions are a useful part of our nature ; for certainly God had never endued us with them if they were to serve to no purpose, or only to a bad one. God hath so made, and so placed us here, that our present welfare depends on the things about us ; but if we had no passions, if we were not at all moved or affected with these things, we should take no manner of care about them.

But though the passions are a useful part of our nature, yet they are but a part of it ; there is another, and that a superior part of us, which is our reason. This is a faculty, which God hath given us, by which we are capable of distinguishing the good and evil arising from the things about us—and not only of distinguishing the one from the other—but of comparing the several degrees of both with one another, and, in consequence of such comparison, of forming a judgment upon the whole, by which we may direct our actions.

This

This rational faculty, besides furnishing us with a judgment of the good and evil about us, leads us to religion, to a knowledge of God, and of our duty to him. It shews us what natural religion requires of us, and enables us to understand what revealed religion hath set before us; and from a survey of both it shews us the rules, which God hath given us for the conduct of our lives, and which it is our duty to follow, if we mean to be happy in his favour.

There is no room to deliberate, which of these two parts of our nature, our passions or our reason, is the more worthy, whether that which urges us on to what appears to be good, or that which enables us to distinguish what is really so; whether that which urges us through the gratification of appetite to a transient pleasure, or that which leads us through a discharge of duty to durable happiness. As little room is there to deliberate, which of these two parts of our nature, the more or the less worthy, should govern the other; whether, as mere animals only, we should be governed by the passions, or whether, as we are made rational and religious creatures, it is not naturally fit, that we should be governed by reason and religion.

Two great instances of misconduct, arising from the passions, are—when they shew themselves on wrong occasions — and, when they arise above duty on any occasions; and the general work of reason and religion, in governing the passions, is to confine them to proper occasions, and within a right measure.

Now, the first question which arises, upon the proposal of any work, is this—Is it *practicable*?

We should take great care, not to entertain the notion, that the restraint of our passions in any instance is impracticable: we are very apt indeed to say so on many occasions, but whoever really thinks so, is not likely to mend his behaviour, but is in a sure way to make it worse. Such a notion obstructs all means of amendment; for *he* will never try to subdue a passion, who is persuaded, that it is not to be subdued. But this is not all; for, as he who will not try to subdue a passion, of course indulges it, so the persuasion that it is impracticable to subdue it, produces a persuasion that he is excusable in indulging it; frequent claims of excuse on such occasions will produce a persuasion that there wants none, and men will at last think it right to follow what at first they thought it impracticable to oppose.

Thus,

Thus, by not laying a restraint upon wrong actions, men fall into a wrong and corrupt judgment — which establishes wickedness in their own hearts, and too frequently promotes it in the hearts of others, who readily take such doctrine and example as an excuse for not controlling their passions, and as a call to a free indulgence of them.

But the government of the passions is a practicable work — there are examples of those who are masters over those passions, to which others are slaves. Some, indeed, affect to depreciate such examples — we plainly see why — because such examples, by shewing the duty to be practicable, reproach them for not performing it. Hence it is, that those who shew such examples are judged to be either stupid creatures or hypocrites, as not having passions, or as secretly indulging them; but this judgment, as it is only a proof, that they who make it are slaves to their passions, will have no weight with sober men; — with wicked men it may have weight, who have a sort of interest in such judgment, such sort of interest as the devil acts by, who is for making as many like himself as possible — corrupts all he can, and those he cannot corrupt, he blackens.

But

But examples, which shew how others govern their passions, will be differently treated by those, who are desirous of governing their own; that when they see men of the same make and disposition with themselves acting temperately and steadily under the provocation of the passions, will naturally ask themselves, why they may not do so too? the examples will not only encourage them, by shewing the work to be practicable, but will farther inspire them with emulation in imitating a virtuous fortitude of mind—a quality which good men will always approve, however wicked men, because they do not attain it, may despise it.

But, without attending to what we see in others, if we only attend to what we feel within ourselves, we may soon be convinced, that the government of the passions is a practicable work.

One thing we are very apt to feel, which may lead us to suspect, at least, that it is practicable to govern our passions, and that is, the inward reproach of mind, which follows an immoderate indulgence of them. For, whence this secret reproach, if we feel not ourselves accountable for such indulgence? and

and how should we feel ourselves accountable, if we are not capable of restraining it? We feel not this inward reproach for any of the necessary and involuntary motions belonging to us, nor should we feel it for the immoderate indulgence of the passions, if that too was necessary and involuntary. This secret reproach, then, arising from the sense we feel, that we are accountable for the use of the passions, shews that we might have acted otherwise; but that could not be, if we had no power over the passions;—and having a power over them, if we will use it, it is practicable to govern them; and the plea, that it is impracticable is never believed in the judgment of the world, nor do they who make it believe themselves. The plea is the plea of the passions, not of reason, or of conscience.

Another thing which shews a restraint of the passions to be practicable is, that though they are few, who rule all their passions, yet they are fewer still, who are subdued by all of them, and who do not restrain some passions, though perhaps on no better motive, than that they may more freely indulge others; but, whatever be the motive, the restraint, we see, is practicable; and it seems strange, that what

we can do to serve a bad purpose, should be thought impracticable in compliance with our duty. This observation, applied to ourselves and others, will satisfy us, that all the passions may be governed, since we may not only observe one man governing a passion, which another does not, but the same man governing different passions on different occasions.

Since then the government of the passions is practicable, this is so far encouragement to set about it.—But in setting about any work, there yet remain two very important questions, which offer themselves to be answered: they are, *Why* we should set about it? and, *How* we should set about it? A motive, and a manner, are absolutely necessary in every work, and both reason and religion will supply us with these in the work of governing the passions.

1. Reasonable motives for governing our passions are obvious enough — “who so seek-
“eth them (to use Solomon’s expression),
“shall have no great travel, for he shall
“find them sitting at his door.” The many mischiefs which arise from the indulgence of the passions, are so many reasonable motives for governing them: I mean not only such
public

public mischiefs as throw the world into confusion, but also such private mischiefs as each man feels within and about himself from not governing his passions. Solomon says, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."—A city in this state affords a scene of confusion and ruin; and such, Solomon says, is the state of a mind where the spirit is not duly governed, full of disorder within, and exposed to danger without.

Whoever sets a just value on his rational faculty, must feel a sensible motive for guarding himself against whatever tends to spoil him of it. So much depends upon having this faculty properly disposed and properly applied, that the greatest mischief we can suffer is to have it discomposed, and to be disabled from applying it; yet this mischief we suffer from the excess of the passions. For, as in a city that is broken down, nothing is in its right place, no person in his right post or function, but all lies in confusion within and exposed to danger without—so it is in a mind broken down by the passions, our rational faculties are all out of place, out of function, we cannot think as we ought to do,

do, we feel ourselves very uneasy, and exposed to any thing that may make us still more so. The uneasiness we feel is mischief severe enough, and as much worth guarding against as a distemper of the body, since it as much disqualifies us, either for the business or for the enjoyment of life, as that does. A fever of the mind is as bad, perhaps a worse malady, than a fever of the body. But, besides the inward uneasiness we feel from the excess of passion whilst it lasts, there arises a more poignant one afterwards from our reflection upon it; — we see not the excess of passion till we are in it, and we cannot bear to look at it when we are out of it. But besides these inward uneasinesses belonging to the excess of the passions, the outward danger to which it exposes us should make us very careful how we are betrayed into it. Solomon's similitude in the text supposes, that there were or might be enemies ready to come up against this broken and defenceless city, for otherwise it might as safely lie without walls as within them; and, whether we will suppose it or not, a man in the like condition will always find enemies ready to take advantage of his broken and defenceless mind—at least he will not fail to appear ridiculous, and
those

those who may have no mischief, will have a taunt against him, the taunt of the prophet against the city of Nineveh—"Every one
" that passeth by him shall hiss, and wag
" his head, and say, How is he become a
" desolation, a place for beasts to lie down
" in!"—for when reason is turned out of the mind, who can tell, what beasts of passion and of vice may lay down in it?

But the excess of the passions not only exposes us to mischief, but works a great deal; if it be mischief—to disoblige our friends—to offend those who love us—to disturb conversation and society—and, after losing our own peace of mind, to destroy the peace of others.

Reasonable motives, then, for governing the passions are obvious enough, and strong; but if reason points out much to us on this matter, religion will shew us more.

S E R M O N XVI.

The same Subject continued.

PROVERBS XXV. 28,

He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

IN my last discourse I observed, that in the proposal of any work, and consequently in the work of governing our passions, three questions naturally offer themselves to be answered; namely — Is it practicable? — Why we should set about it? — and, How we should set about it? — The first I have answered, by shewing, that our government of the passions is practicable. The second I have answered, so far as to shew what motives from reason there are, why we should govern them, which I drew from the natural mischiefs which arise from our not governing them. I concluded

my discourse with saying, that if reason points out much to us on this matter, religion, if we will attend to it, will shew us more.

Religion, then, will shew us, that the excess of the passions is sinful.

Though the passions are a useful part of our nature, which God hath given us, and, when properly managed, promote the welfare of it, yet it is certain, that, when carried to excess, they are prejudicial to it; they then hurt the work of God, consequently are displeasing to God, and therefore on that account sinful. But God hath made us not only natural, but rational and moral beings, and it is his will, that our actions should be directed by our reason; in every instance, therefore, where we set aside our reason from governing our passions, and directing our behaviour, we oppose the will of God; this too must be displeasing to God, and therefore sinful. But farther, God, by his revelation in the gospel of Christ, hath strictly enjoined us to restrain and govern our natural passions, and therefore, whenever we indulge them to excess, we act contrary to the express word and command of God, which must be displeasing to him, and consequently sinful. Thus the excess of the passions is sinful, as being opposite to the
2 work

work — opposite to the will — and opposite to the command, of God.

We are the more concerned to attend to what religion shews us on this point, because without that we shall be too liable to disregard what mere reason sets before us. A man may slight his character as a rational being, who may be struck with the reflection that he is a being accountable to God for his behaviour, and dependent upon God for his happiness: he may rashly sacrifice his present ease, and the love of mankind, to his passions; but he will pause at the more expensive sacrifice, in giving up his future eternal happiness, and the favour of God, to the gratification of them.

This then is a motive for governing our passions which religion sets before us, and which will have its proper effect upon us, in proportion as we are desirous to please God, and solicitous for the consequence of doing so. The pleasing God, and meriting the great reward of his favour, are considerations which should habitually influence our behaviour; but these considerations we are never more destitute of, than when we are under any excess of the passions, when we lose all thought of God, and all reflection, that what
we

we are doing is displeasing to him; — that reflection once lost, all security, all restraint is gone, our walls are broken down, we are laid open to every provocation, every sin, and we are hurried by our passions, as by a whirlwind, to destruction.

It is therefore another very important motive, or consideration, which religion sets before us for governing our passions — that the excess of them is not only sinful in itself, but naturally carries us into more and greater sin. The intemperance of one passion will reach, and set fire to other passions; and one sin, or one mischief, raised, will call up many more to attend it. This, which any of you can more easily think, than I can describe, is a situation sufficient to alarm any but the profligate mind, which makes no account of sin, and is regardless how much guilt it incurs, or how great mischief it works, both to itself and others; but the sober mind will dread such a situation, and, sensible of the difficulty in guarding against a single temptation, even with all its powers about it, will be careful how it falls in the way of a legion, when every power which should protect it is disabled.

There yet remains another motive, or consideration, which religion sets before us for

for governing our passions, and that is—that the excess of them corrupts the mind, spoils that temper and disposition in us, which best qualifies us for our proper duty here, and for our proper happiness hereafter. These two points are the great end and design of religion—to conduct us through the duties of this life, and thereby to fit us for the happiness of the next; and it is the true work of religion to set before us whatever tends to promote this great design, as well as to teach us to avoid whatever may obstruct it.

Regularity and evenness of temper is the best foundation of human virtue; it is this, which makes our behaviour consistent, and renders our several duties in life practicable and easy; it is this, which constitutes and distinguishes the prudent man.

The same temper and disposition adapts us for that improvement of human virtue, which religion brings with it, and renders the duties *that* enjoins, not only practicable, but pleasant. “God dwelleth in the quiet humble mind;” which is the best foundation of spiritual improvement, as it best qualifies us for attending to the important message of salvation which religion sets before us, for meditating on the state to which it is leading us, and
best

best fits our affections and faculties for the enjoyment of it.

We do not often enough reflect what we are intended for, and to what state we are shortly to be called; else, surely, we should be exceeding jealous of any thing that tends to destroy that temper of mind, which must qualify us, not only for deserving, but even for relishing, the happiness intended for us. The excess of the passions, which so sensibly spoils our present quiet, can never contribute to our future happiness. Imagine the intemperate man placed at once in the society of saints and angels — how is he fitted to relish and enjoy such society? No more than a savage is fitted to relish the civilized company of men. So far indeed it would be well, that such will not be carried to what they are not fitted to enjoy, were it not, that they will be carried to what they will deserve to suffer.

If then we are candidates for a heavenly state after this, we must beforehand fit our dispositions for it; and, in order to this, we must govern our passions, which, when unrestrained, cherish in us such dispositions, as are totally unworthy of heaven — totally unfit for it. But when reason and religion have contributed their influence for keeping them within

within their just bounds, they leave us to that serenity of mind, which enables us to discern and follow the several duties of our present state, and which, whilst religion shows us heaven, both disposes us to seek it, and qualifies us for enjoying it. Like pilgrims, we calmly pass by the temptations and inconveniencies of our journey through life, and, with a full view before us of the city to which we are hastening, we pursue the path which will infallibly bring us to it, where we are prepared to be happy, as we know we shall be welcome.

Such, then, are the motives or considerations for governing our passions, which both reason and religion set before us; — and thus far I have endeavoured to answer the second question belonging to this work, namely, *Why* we should set about it?

We are now to consider, *How* we are to set about it.

In the entrance upon this subject, I took notice, that two great instances of misconduct in the use of the passions are — when they shew themselves on wrong occasions — and, when they rise above duty on any occasions. Nothing is more common, than to see men loving what they ought to hate, and hating what

what they ought to love; rejoicing in what they ought to grieve at, and angry at what they ought to be pleased with. — Or, where they have right objects of their passions, we see them carried into excess; we see them loving, hating, rejoicing, grieving, angry, or delighted, though with proper objects, yet in an improper and disproportionate degree; not prosecuting the best things with the strongest affections, and the least with the weakest, but oftentimes the reverse; as we may see, by reflecting with how weak affections we seek God, and our spiritual good, and with how strong affections we are fastened to the world, and the temporal good about us.

The work, then, of reason and religion, in governing our passions, is—to confine them to proper objects and occasions—and, to keep them within a right measure.—This is the general rule we are to observe—the application of which to particular cases in life, as it is made with more or less attention and care, distinguishes men, more or less, for prudence, constancy, and moderation in their behaviour.

I. First then, reason will tell us, that the application of this general rule must be carefully made in all cases, where any of the

the passions is concerned, one as well as another.

The passions are, some of them, painful, as sorrow, fear, anger, and hatred; others are pleasing passions, as joy, mirth, love, and hope. This difference in the passions themselves occasions a difference of conduct in our management of them; for we are commonly more upon our guard against the painful ones, than we are against those which are pleasing. This is natural enough; but, however, it should be remembered, that the one, though they are painful, may be useful to us, and that the other, however pleasing, may be dangerous; for, however we accustom ourselves to call those the evils of life, which excite the painful passions, yet do they often operate to our good, whilst the pleasing passions operate to our hurt; the one corrects our dispositions, the other disorders them; and however natural it may be to follow them for what they have pleasing in them, they frequently lead us to what is otherwise, and even into those painful passions themselves, which we are solicitous to avoid.

We are therefore to take care and watch the pleasing passions, as well as the painful ones, that they may be kept within the prescriptions

tions of reason and duty, that they may not run out on wrong objects, or into excess after right ones. They are as liable to excess, if not more so, than the painful passions, and, in their excess, are very apt to betray us into sin—which, as it deprives us of a good conscience, and our title to the favour of God, overthrows the very best foundation for constancy of mind, which we should carry with us into every scene of life, but which we often in vain wish for under the troubles of the world, because we have before lost it among the pleasures of it; for nothing is surer from experience, than that, by indulging our passions in the latter, we disable ourselves for controlling them in the former—the mind, that is spent in running after pleasure, has not strength to stand up and grapple with affliction.

Whoever then aims at the character of ruling his spirit, must be able to govern all the passions;—such come short of the character, who, though they are superior to some passions, yet are slaves to others; and, after withstanding the provocations of the world, are subdued by its temptations.

They govern their passions, not who never feel them — *that* hardly belongs to us; — but who

who can always restrain them from breach of duty—from discomposing or defiling the mind. Such feel an immediate satisfaction, far superior to the gratification of passion, which is not only transient, but painful in its consequences; but the reflection of having resisted a passion, of having escaped the dreadful triple alliance of guilt, mischief, and remorse, is pleasing — and it is lasting. — With this pleasure in our conscience, and the commands, the example, the promises of Christ in our hearts, in whatever path of life we are set, we may proceed with constancy, coolness, and estimation, till we arrive at happiness, and at heaven.

who can always restrain from breach of duty—from disobedience or from the mind. Such feel an immediate attraction, far more to the gratification of passion, which is not only transient, but painful in its consequences; but the reflection of having renounced a part of the having enjoyed the blessing of an alliance of guilt, and thereby, is a blessing—God is a Father—With this view in our conscience, and the commands of the promise of Christ in our hearts, in whatever path of life we are led, we may proceed with confidence, coolness, and affection, till we arrive at happiness, and at heaven.

S E R M O N XVII.

The same Subject continued.

PROVERBS XXV. 28.

He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

NOR will it be sufficient that we are upon our guard against all the passions, unless we are always and habitually so.

The allusion which Solomon hath set forth in the text illustrates this advice: “He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.”—Therefore, he that hath rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is entire, and well surrounded with walls;—such a city is in a state of constant guard and security against the enemy; not only now and then, but always;—

its walls are not sometimes standing, and sometimes down, broken in some places and strong in others, and so to be rebuilt and repaired as occasions call for it, but they are always and every where in condition to defend it against assaults, from whatever quarter they come, or however suddenly.

It requires great expence to put a city into such a state of security ; — and it requires as much care to bring the mind to that condition which is represented by it — to be prepared against all provocations to excess, which any of the passions may throw in our way, and to be habitually so. Solomon, in another place, has preferred the character of him, who ruleth his spirit, to his, who taketh a city ; — and whoever sets about it, will find great generalship necessary in the conflict, and steady government over the passions : it requires wise consideration, much resolution, great experience, and perpetual vigilance over ourselves and others. Yet, difficult as this work may be, it must be gone through, if we would arrive at a temperate, even, and consistent behaviour ; — a character which belongs not to those, who, like the sea, are sometimes smooth and calm, yet liable to swell, if not with one wind of passion, yet with another ; but it belongs to those, who,

who, like a rock, are immoveable by any storm, and against which all winds and waves are spent in vain.

3. In order to arrive at this character, reason will direct us to consider well our natural temper and turn of mind, and to correct what we find faulty in it, and which serves to feed the passions to excess.

We call our temper and turn of mind natural, and are apt, for that reason, to think it unalterable; and yet, if we will examine it, we shall find, that it has much belonging to it of our own putting in; or, if there be something in it, which we could not well help getting in, at least it is in our power to turn it out. The excess of the passions arises from something that is faulty in our temper; and whatever is faulty ought to be removed, and therefore may be removed; and this must be done, if we would succeed in governing our passions. That temper and turn of mind, which, upon reflection on ourselves, we find to be the food of any particular passion, must be corrected, if we would effectually subdue that passion; without doing this, it is but sorry triumph, that we are, on this or that occasion, stout enough to oppose it, and dispute its progress, if, on other occasions,

it will have its turn of victory. The surest and the shortest way of defeating an enemy, is to cut off his supplies; and the best way to defeat any passion, is to withdraw that which gives it strength. Thus anger, in its excess, arises always from something that is faulty in our temper, generally from pride;—when we feel this to be our case, the surest way to govern our anger, is to lower that pride which feeds it. In this and many other instances we find one passion giving rise to another; so that by this method of examining and correcting what gives occasion to the excess of any particular passion, we gain the advantage, that, whilst we are endeavouring to govern one passion, we are, at the same time, subduing another.

The examining and correcting what is faulty in our temper is a work, which, however impracticable we may think it, because we do not care to set about it, yet must be practicable, because it is necessary; it is the work, which belongs to our human, as well as our religious condition, as rational but imperfect creatures. God who hath placed us in this condition, must not be charged with setting his creatures impracticable work; who yet hath set man this work, to watch his disposition,

fiction, which is ever prone to what is evil; and, by the assistance of that reason which he hath given him, and that instruction and hope which he hath set before him, to purify and improve his human nature, and, by so doing, qualify it for, what is hereafter intended it, a participation of the divine nature.

This should be our constant work; which, however, we are too apt to neglect; and therefore the excess of the passions, bad as it is, hath this good arising from it, that it calls us to this work; it reminds us that our temper is faulty, and calls us to correct it—which if we do, though with the view only of governing a particular passion, we take a great step in the general work that is set us, of improving our nature, and making ourselves better men.

Such enquiry into our natural temper and turn of mind will not only shew us what faulty part of it heightens any particular passion to excess, but will shew us likewise how we came by it, which is a very material step towards knowing how to get rid of it; for though the depravity of our human nature draws us towards evil in general, yet there are other causes which draw men to this or that particular evil. Our general depravity is something
P 4 within

within us; but the mind imbibes particular depravities from without;—our education, our conversation with the world, our method of life, have a powerful effect upon our minds, not only in giving them their particular turn, but also in instilling many notions (humours we may call them), which, sticking to the mind, become faulty parts of our temper, and, when any of the passions strike upon them, are very apt to feed and heighten them to excess.

These must be diligently watched; and a work it is, it must be owned, which will require our best attention—to discover what is faulty in our temper—to discern how we came by it—and, resolutely to turn it out. What heightens the difficulty of this work is, that the humours men have drawn from their education, their conversation with the world, and their manner of life, and which serve to feed the passions, are often such as appear to be commendable qualities in themselves, for which reason we never think of removing them out of our way; but however commendable such qualities may appear, we are always to remember, that so far as they serve to feed any passion to excess, they are truly faults in our temper,

temper, and we should endeavour to correct them.

It will be to much better purpose, thus to study to reform our temper, than to watch the particular and accidental instances of merely restraining a passion; — the former work, if well executed, will render the latter unnecessary — and it is because we do so little in the one, that we have so much to do in the other.

4. Besides examining and correcting our natural temper, we should, in the fourth place, be very vigilant over the motion which the mind makes towards any particular passion, and jealous of the very first and slightest occasion that may raise it. We should not depend on our ability in moderating such passion, when it is ready to come forth in speech or action; we must look farther back, and not let it sit to be brooded under our thoughts, where it may gather strength beyond our mastery. It is a dangerous boasting in our prudence, to put ourselves in the way of a passion, that we may shew our skill in managing it, and we are often foiled in the experiment; — the best place for managing any passion is within; and the best way of managing it is — to think

think of any thing, rather than of what may feed and encourage it.

And if we are not to think of what may encourage a passion, much less should we do any thing which may have such effect;—if, in order to govern our passions, we must have a government over our thoughts, we should be especially jealous of all those steps in our conduct which tend to deprive us of such government.

Intemperance in the use of sensual pleasures has certainly this tendency; nothing more enflames the mind, or disables our rational faculty; and therefore, whoever would maintain rule over his spirit, will, as much as possible, keep clear of such treacherous provocatives, as will throw him off his guard.

Nor are they only sensual pleasures, that are to be avoided on this account: there are other provocatives, which weaken the government we should hold over our spirit; for we see men, who are by no means to be charged with intemperance in the use of sensual pleasures, who yet are very weak in the management of their passions, and careless of the common occasions which excite them—nay, instead of avoiding such occasions, we
may

may observe them too often industriously seeking them.

We see this in the many disputes, that are raised every day among us, in which men of sense lose their temper on very trifling occasions; where it is equally wonderful, that such occasions should have such effect, or, that having such effect, they should not be more cautiously avoided.

When a man feels himself zealous, he should suspect himself to be faulty in his temper, and should endeavour to correct it; and, with that view, should avoid every occasion, however indifferent to others, which he finds is apt to excite his zeal—which, because it is sometimes a commendable thing, we are apt to treat as if it could never be otherwise, and, what is worse, we are very apt to cover our prejudices and our resentments under this title; but zeal, even in a good cause, may work mischief—and the best cause will not excuse or repair the mischief it works, when it helps our passions to a mastery over our reason and religion.

A wise man strengthens his cause by moderating his zeal, and will never be thought to desert it, by avoiding all such occasions as would disable him from serving it with credit;
but

but when, as is generally the case, our prejudices and resentments set our zeal at work; we ought, not only to moderate, but to suppress it—and, besides avoiding every occasion, that may carry it too high, we should go farther, and remove the very cause that produces it.

I come now to finish what I have to offer on the government of the passions. I have observed, that it is a practicable work; and that, if we have recourse to reason and religion, they will join in assisting us to accomplish it. — Not only reason, I observed, but common experience, will shew us *why* we should govern our passions, by pointing at the natural mischiefs which arise from our not governing them. And religion, I observed, will farther shew us, that the excess of the passions not only is sinful in itself, but naturally leads to more and greater sin—that it corrupts the mind, and spoils that disposition in us, which best qualifies us for the regular and steady discharge of our duty. I have observed farther, that reason will shew us not only *why* we should govern our passions, but also *how* we are to govern them; and that the first direction reason gives us in this matter is to make no exceptions, but to govern all the passions.

passions, as well as any of them ; for we can hardly be said to govern our passions, if, whilst we are superior to some, we are slaves to others. Nor is it, I observed, sufficient that we are upon our guard against all the passions, unless we are always and habitually so;—in order to which, it is necessary we should consider well our natural temper and turn of mind, and be careful to correct whatever we find serves to feed any passion to excess; for many things, commendable in themselves, become faulty in those on whom they have a bad effect; — we should forbear such occasions—and be very vigilant over the motion which the mind makes towards any passion, and jealous of the first and slightest occasion that may raise it.

Thus far reason will direct us in the manner we should use for governing our passions—let us next attend to the assistance, which our religion affords us in this work.

persons as well as any of them. We can
hardly be said to govern our passions, as
we are not free to do so. We have
to others. Nor is it I believe, sufficient
that we are upon our guard against all the
passions, which we are always and habitually
to, in order to which, it is necessary we should
control well our natural temper and manner of
mind, and be careful to correct whatever we
find liable to lead any passion to excess. We
may thus become sensible to the influence
become lively in those on whom they have
a bad effect — we must therefore, keep our
eyes — and be very vigilant over the position
which the mind takes towards any passion,
and beware of the first and slightest occasion
that may arise.

There is a great deal to be said for this
not a good deal of the same, but this
does not seem to attend so much on the subject
of the mind as it is to the subject of the

S E R M O N XVIII.

The same Subject continued,

PROVERBS XXV. 28.

He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

I. **R**ELIGION shews us heaven, and our way to it; and in so doing certainly shews us what is worth looking at; — and if we be really desirous of arriving there, we shall be constantly looking at it. This, which is our necessary employment, under the direction of religion, is an effectual method for governing our passions.

As the passions are implanted in us, purposely, to connect us, in a proper degree, with the things about us here — so they arise from them, and are wholly fed and employed by

by them; consequently, in proportion as these objects are withdrawn, or, which amounts to the same thing, in proportion as our attention to them is withdrawn, and placed on heavenly objects, our passions will become more easy and manageable;—not that we can so fix our attention on heavenly objects, as to feel no concern for earthly ones, or no passions arising from them; but, in proportion as we heighten our attention to the former, we are less liable to the intemperance of the passions arising from the latter.

I said in my last discourse, that we do not often enough reflect what we are intended for, and to what state we are called; a constant attention to this important point, which Christ's gospel sets before us, necessarily puts the mind upon comparing our present with our future state; which comparison sets the objects we are concerned with here in their true light, and teaches us to look upon them, though not as contemptible, yet as trifles, in comparison with the objects which our religious faith sets before us. This judgment, habitually used, and confirmed in us, will produce in us a desire of heaven, which will much abate that sensibility with which the matters of this
life

life affect us; for when the mind has bent its thoughts to things of greater moment, it naturally loses its attention to lesser things. In this disposition, the ordinary provocatives to intemperate passions are either not felt, or easily set by; — for what is the great and mighty matter, from whence they arise? — We smile to see children anxious and eager about their toys, and know that it is, because they have no notion or relish for higher things; but as we advance in life, and the business of the world lays hold of the mind, we disregard the toys of infancy; — and thus, in proportion as the concerns of the next world engage our attention, we disregard the trifles of the present. — Faith in God's promises, and serious reflection on the shortness of this life, and the certainty of a better, will make this world sit very easy and loose about us; it may have our company — we are placed in it; — but so long as it has not our hearts, it will have little influence on our passions, and the state of our mind will be like that of the house, which the wise man builds, upon a rock; the rains may descend, the floods may come, and the winds may blow against such house — it will not fall, it is founded on a rock.

2. The fixing our thoughts then on heavenly things, which is one part of our employment under religion, is an effectual method for governing our passions:—another part of our employment under religion, closely connected with the preceding, will give us farther assistance in this work, and that is, in the apostle's language, the “renewing of our mind, and cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of spirit.”

If we think of heaven, and feel a desire of going thither, we must at the same time think it absolutely necessary that we should prepare our dispositions for it;—with all our inordinate lusts and passions about us, we can be no fit guests for those pure and happy mansions. This therefore will put us upon the work of renewing and cleansing our minds; and we know how expressly this work is enjoined us in the gospel of Christ. —Every step we take in this business is a step, and a most material one, towards governing our passions—the excess of which arises entirely from those very things within us, which religion sets us at work to remove, and therefore, these once removed, the intemperance of the passions falls of course. This work, well followed, in proportion

portion as it removes what is faulty in our dispositions, will set what is good in its place, and will establish in us a religious and sedate temper, under which we shall experience a readiness of mind, and a constant supply of ability, in suppressing every motion towards intemperate passion, which, notwithstanding our best care, may sometimes arise to try our constancy.

This work of renewing and cleansing the mind, difficult as it may seem, is no more than what philosophers of old said might be done, and some of them did it. If then philosophy, under all its disadvantages, attempted this work, shall not a Christian faith, and the sure hopes of immortality, if we will attend to it, be able to effect it?

3. It may be a work of time to establish within us this pure and religious temper of mind, which is so effectual in helping us to govern our passions; and therefore, during our pursuit of this work, religion will supply us, on all occasions, with what will be a useful guard to defend us against any sudden attack of the passions, as it prompts us frequently to reflect on the rewards and punishments set forth to us in the gospel of Christ.

They are not set forth there merely to acquaint us with God's power, and future purposes; but that a due consideration of them may have a present effect in regulating our behaviour.

When the passions urge us forward to excess and sin, let us instantly call to mind what punishment the gospel hath set at the end of the course we are proposing, and let us seriously ask ourselves, whether any intermediate gratifications will answer so fatal a conclusion? or, if we fret at the restraint, which such consideration may lay upon us, let us call to mind the reward which the gospel sets before us for our encouragement, and let us ask ourselves, whether an immediate improvement in goodness and wisdom, the pleasure arising from the approbation of conscience, and an eternal enjoyment of happiness in the presence of God, will not amply repay our present uneasiness? In all instances of intemperate passion, where the effect is more immediate, let us always strive — to think, before we act — to think, before we speak; — a moment's thought, well directed, and attended to, may stop an action or a word of endless consequence — the thought that God will judge and punish us.

That

That this thought is not far to seek, men know to their cost, when they feel, that they have no sooner committed a rash or sinful action, but this thought instantly rushes into the mind — pity, it had not found its way thither before, when it would have presented itself as a friend to advise them; but, in this situation, it comes as a judge to condemn them. — But then, in order to have the advantage of such previous and friendly reflection upon a sudden emergency, we must be much used to it, before we so sensibly need it. The religious mind, that maintains a constant acquaintance with God, will easily think of him, as on all occasions, so, particularly, whenever it is tempted to disobey him; — but the profligate mind will hardly recollect what it has long forgotten, and when a thought of God presents itself, immediately after any rash or sinful action, it seems rather to be of God's sending, than of its own seeking.

4. The last advantage I shall mention, with which religion supplies us, towards the government of our passions, is prayer to God, for his grace and assistance.

The duty of prayer our religion expressly sets us, and the benefit of God's grace on our hearts it bids us expect from the due performance

of it—however irreligious men may despise the former, or conceited men may affect to doubt of the latter.

In having recourse to the duty of prayer for governing our passions, we have this great advantage, that the very disposition of mind, that is necessary for our right performance of the duty of prayer, is the very disposition that best qualifies us for governing our passions; which is humility and purity of mind. In proportion as these qualities occupy the mind, intemperate passions can have no place there, which wholly spring from pride and filthiness of spirit. The man who prays to God—I do not mean the man who says his prayers to God, but the man who prays to God, as he ought, with true devotion—such a one feels at that time no inordinate affections predominant in his breast, consequently is so far in a condition to prepare himself against them, as he has them for the present at some distance; and since he must lay them aside, in order to pray as he ought, he has so far an opportunity of experiencing his power in controlling them, if he will apply it.

But this power of our own in controlling the passions may not be such, but we may be glad of God's assistance in the work; if we
rightly

rightly feel ourselves— if we rightly understand the gospel, we cannot do without it;—and shall assuredly be supplied with it, if we pray to God for it, who giveth wisdom liberally to those who ask it, and upbraideth not. The work of making in us a clean heart, and of renewing a right spirit, is the work of God; even those who call it the work of our own rational faculties, cannot stop there; for our rational faculties themselves are the work, the gift, of God; and God, who gave them, can doubtless direct and strengthen them; and will do so, if we pray to him for it as we ought to pray; without this we cannot expect it: for why, it may be asked, has God made us capable of the duty of prayer, but that we should perform it? and if so, how can we expect his blessings, if, having made us capable of asking them, we yet refuse to ask them?

But then, we should well remember, that it is not barely prayer, no, not the unfeigned prayer of the heart, much less the feigned prayer of the lips, that will procure us the mastery over our passions, without setting ourselves at the same time to work for accomplishing it. God will assist, but not indulge, our weakness; we must join hearty endeavours

to hearty prayer, and that will procure us what we want. Those, who only pray that they may get the better of their passions, but never resolve, or, if they resolve, never try to get the better of them, do no more than merely wish for it; — but wishes alone never yet broke fetters, or set the slave at liberty. But when, after earnest prayer to God, for his assistance in strengthening our faculties, we rise with full resolution to exert them; and vigilantly take every opportunity of composing and improving our hearts and dispositions — by directing and fixing our thoughts on heavenly objects — by withdrawing the food of our passions — by suppressing them in their first motions — and by avoiding every occasion and provocative that may set them upon us; — then may we hope for success and victory over them; then may we possess our souls in ease and serenity; then may we break asunder the fetters of sin, and enjoy the happy liberty of the children of God.

S E R M O N XIX.

THE DUTY OF INDUSTRY.

1 THESSALONIANS IV. 10, 11, 12.

We beseech you, brethren, that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

THE apostle in this advice recommends an industrious behaviour, and points it out, as the natural means for living honestly and comfortably.

The apostle advises us to be quiet, and to do our own business; — but this is not to be understood, as absolutely excluding all kind of concern in the business of others. The duties of humanity will often take us from home to assist the welfare of others. The common

common interests of mankind are so blended together, that each man's business cannot lie wholly within himself. So far therefore as humanity, or our own welfare, is concerned in the conduct of others, so far we have a right to send our enquiry; which, though it reaches to the business of others, does not reach beyond our own.

But though the apostle by this advice does not forbid all kind of concern in the business of others, he forbids an impertinent one; and this sort of quietness about the affairs of others is very properly connected with an attention to our own, for they mutually produce each other. The mind is too active to be wholly unemployed — and therefore, if we restrain it from what does not concern us, it will naturally take to what does. On the other hand, as the mind is too active to be wholly unemployed, so 'tis not active enough to be employed different ways at once; and therefore, by engaging it where our true business lies, it is hindered from running out where it has none. — The short and plain object, then, of the apostle's advice is to recommend an industrious application to the business appointed us.

And

And this he does, by laying down two very considerable advantages attending it — as it is productive of virtue and order in society — and, as it is a natural means for making life easy and comfortable: — “That ye may walk honestly, and have lack of nothing.”

To justify this recommendation, we may observe,

1. Industry keeps men from vice.

Business fills the mind, and shuts out vice by shutting out the occasions of it; but idleness throws open the heart to every temptation that offers to take possession of it, and not only leaves us unguarded against vice, but invites it to attack us. With all our fancied strength of virtue and of reason on our side, this is bold imprudence. The surest way of combating vice is to fight it flying. It is one thing to argue against vice, when we are out of the reach of trial, and another to meet it and resist it; in the former case we have our reason to assist us, in the latter we have the passions to betray us. It is safer, therefore, to have no time to meet temptation. — And let no one say, that the industrious man, because he has not leisure to be wicked, is not therefore virtuous; — ’tis virtuous to be well employed, and

and no less a mark of constancy to avoid temptation than it is to resist it.

The industrious man is safe too, because as he has less leisure so he has less inclination to be wicked; for it is the indulgence of the passions that feeds, and by feeding heightens, not satisfies, appetite. This mischievous circumstance lies not in the way of the industrious man, who must deny himself the indulgence of appetite, in order to carry on his business with success. He therefore has his appetites in subjection, by starving them into compliance, and is free from those temptations, which would lead him to be mischievous or offensive to society. As he has shortened his appetites, he has shortened his wants, and, finding that honest industry can supply him with what virtue and nature call for, he has no inducements to pursue dishonest methods for procuring what vice and passion would demand. And as he feels no calls after dishonest acquirements, so neither is he inclined to make a licentious use of what he enjoys. His thoughts have been constantly turned from an attention to vice in procuring the good he has, and will naturally lead him from it in the application; — it is when vice helps us to what we want, that

that it claims an authority in directing us how to use it; as, when it has tempted us to mispend our good, we readily have recourse to it for a supply. — Thus the industrious man, by being guarded against those vices, which either want or wantonness occasion, keeps himself at least an inoffensive member of society. — But he does more — for we may observe

2. Industry leaves men open to such virtues as support and adorn society.

Business satisfies the mind, and, by making it easy, composes and adapts it for the direction of reason. The mind, by being kept in an unnatural state for want of business, is fickle and uneven; the spirits are palled, and we meet with more disquietude than otherwise we should have. For, if we are not engaged in the *business* of life, its *trifles* will lay hold of us, which are oftentimes more teizing than the most important business — which strengthens the mind as it sets it at work; but trifles rather harass than employ us.

When the mind is easy, and free from those vicious indulgences which spoil its attention, reason is at liberty to point out the duty we should pursue, and we are properly

perly disposed to observe her directions. For, as every virtue is truly eligible, it will appear so, where vice has not first taken possession of the heart, and makes us reject it, because it contradicts its purposes; but the purposes of honest industry are virtue's work, and when the heart is full of them, if reason recommends more virtues to our choice, we feel no cause for rejecting them as hindrances in our way, but readily accept them as assistants to our purposes. — Thus the industrious man takes home every virtue to his heart that lies within his reach, and the improvements he is making render him not only an inoffensive but a useful member of society.

This general disposition for virtue, which the industrious man feels, is much assisted by another advantage attending his condition. — For we may observe,

3. Industry leaves men open to religion, the best support and ornament of all social virtue.

Whoever aims at success, through the honest business of the world, will sensibly feel how much he wants assistance to get at it, and will naturally wish for the best. Christians cannot be at a loss from what quarter they are to expect that, or how they are to deserve

deserve it. When a diligent application to business, and attention to the events observable in its progress, has led them, as it will, to discover the hand of Providence in the conduct of human affairs, and the regularity of our behaviour makes us easy in such discovery, we are naturally disposed to trust in a power — which we feel we want — which we know is ready to assist us — and to which we are not afraid to have recourse.

A trust in God's providence naturally opens the way to every other duty in religion; for whoever feels a reason for *trusting* in God, will feel a reason for *obeying* him; and, when his express laws have directed by what steps we are to deserve his favour, the industrious man will pursue those steps, as sure means of obtaining it.

When an industrious application to business has led men up to religion, they proceed to the discharge of social virtue with the best security. For though there doubtless is a natural connection between industry and social virtue, yet that connection is more secure when strengthened by religion. The industrious man will feel himself disposed, upon principles of reason, to the practice of such duties

duties as mankind expect from him, and he will see his welfare in this world naturally connected with a discharge of his duty; yet, if his happiness in the next was not concerned too, and if he does not feel a principle of religion directing him in his regard to God, as well as reason, he would often be in danger of choosing wrong, when, as is frequently the case, reason proposes one thing, and interest another; but when God — his law — his promises — and his threats, stand on the side of reason and duty — this is a defence of them, which, though not irresistible, is the greatest that can be set. — Religion, then, if it be not the natural root, from whence social virtue springs, is however a collateral support, which directs and assists its growth; and industry, by planting the former in the heart, furnishes us with the best security of the latter.

The last general observation I shall make, to justify the apostle's character of industry, is,

4. That 'tis a natural means of success; and, though it does not always lead up to affluence, it shews the way to contentment.

Industry

Industry makes men prudent, and prudence naturally works success; — 'tis true, its operations are often interrupted; for we are not absolute masters of the materials, with which we are to make up our happiness here, nor can we see enough into his designs who is. Hence human prudence often fails of the success it aims at, not because it is no proper means for obtaining it, but because a superior power stops its progress, or removes the object it is seeking.

Prudence has a connection, though not an inviolable one, with success — such as is sufficient to make us careful, and at the same time to keep us humble. For God proposes, not only our good, but our obedience, in his government over us; and, as the latter is better secured in a state of dependence than of presumption, so it is more suitable to our condition that we should deserve, rather than that we should command, success.

A prudent industry will hardly fail of success in working its way to the necessities and conveniences of life; — if, in a higher progress above this point, we often find it unsuccessful, the fault is not in the

virtue, but in the application of it, and, though it is industry, it is not prudence.

I may add — nor is it religion; — which, as I have already observed, industry naturally seeks to, for obtaining God's assistance towards success, and under the government of which it should keep itself in the enjoyment of it. Religion authorises us to ask and to expect God's assistance of our industry — not of our wishes — these it restrains, and does not allow us to stand upon God's blessings to be our own providers, and, after he has led us to what he thinks fit for us, to choose other guides for leading us farther to what we wish for.

Thus some put their industry under the guidance of vanity, ambition, or covetousness. — These, like Egyptian task-masters, enjoin impracticable work, or, like impetuous drivers, suffer us not to see the good through which they hurry us. Under these circumstances industry loses its reputation and its name, it is no longer a virtue, but a vice, and, instead of making us happy, makes us miserable, or contemptible.

With better speed, though with less haste, does prudent industry, under the guidance of religion,

religion, set us down, where God appoints us, where we both see and relish the good about us, rather than where God permits us to be, who well knows how to punish the vain, the ambitious, the covetous wish, by gratifying it; who sets men in the slippery places their folly has chosen, that he may shew his own wisdom in casting them down and destroying them — and drenches them with ill-gotten wealth, that his justice may presently steep them in poverty.

Where God appoints us to be, there we are safest; nor is the man of prudent and religious industry solicitous where that is — well knowing, that the higher our state, the greater our duty, and that the lowest is not beneath God's care, his favour, and the comfort of his grace. This disposition and conduct, in the ordinary course of things, usually carries men, though not to the highest, yet above the lowest state, and sets them down, where they feel themselves beyond the reach of real wants, and below the influence of artificial ones; both which contribute to the uneasiness of life, and it is difficult to say which contributes most. — If real wants be more severe, artificial

ones are more extensive, and less easy to be satisfied. — Industry sets us free from both; the industrious man has conquered real wants, and is too attentively engaged to feel artificial ones. His business is sufficient for his care, and the fruits of it sufficient for his happiness. He can reach what he wants, and is wise enough not to spoil his own enjoyments by spoiling and plundering the enjoyments of others — for that is ever the case. The contented man enjoys the good before him, pure and neat; but he who discontentedly plunders another's good to improve his own, brings home mischief with his spoil, and poisons what he would improve; — his own conscience, if he has not stifled it, will torment him — human justice will pursue him — and divine justice will surely overtake him.

You have then this general recommendation of an industrious behaviour — that it is a natural means for making ourselves happy, and for keeping others so, as it restrains us from those vices which poison the heart and disturb society, and furnishes us with those virtues which improve the one and support the other. It leaves us open to the

the influence of religion, and renders us worthy the favour of God, as well as the esteem of mankind, and is a natural step for procuring and enjoying that happiness, which Providence has annexed to the station in life in which he has thought fit to place us.

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S E R M O N XX.

AGUR'S PRAYER.

P R O V E R B S xxx. 8, 9.

*Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me
with food convenient for me: — lest I be full
and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?
or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name
of my God in vain.*

MANKIND is distinguished into a variety of conditions, and the gifts of Providence are distributed among the several parts of it unequally, but not unequally.

The inequality of this dispensation arises from hence; that God, intending we should not only live, but do something, in the state in which he hath placed us, hath so ordered

our condition as to afford us an employment, and, by making us dependent on each other's assistance, hath laid the foundation of such duties, the observance of which is necessary for our well-being here, and will be productive of our happiness hereafter. If then an inequality of condition among mankind be suitable to the designs of Providence, the unequal dispensation of his gifts must be so too, as that is the only method of procuring the other; and this dispensation, though unequal, will yet be equitable, if each condition has as much as it is fitted to receive.

By this rule we are to consider the dispensation of God's blessings, of whatever kind they be; and when we see some men more richly endowed than others, either with intellectual or with natural blessings, we are not from thence to infer, that God has a greater care and regard for one part of mankind than he has for another, but that it is the same care which appoints different conditions in the different parts of mankind.

In this view it may perhaps seem improper to pray for any condition in preference to another, since it is our duty to take that condition, whatever it be, which Providence appoints us.

But

But the duty we owe to the direction of Providence does not imply that we should not choose what we think good or agreeable to us, for that is unavoidable from the very constitution of our nature, by which we are made capable of discerning, and consequently of choosing, what is good. Nor does it imply absolutely that we should not ask for what we choose, for that is not only allowable, but it is commanded us;—but it implies, that whatever we choose, or whatever we ask, we should both choose and ask in submission to the will and appointment of God.

The propriety of the petition thus far settled, let us proceed to consider the general principle from whence it arises, and the particular reasons by which it is supported.

1. The general principle, on which this petition is built, is a religious one. The prophet chooses the middle condition of life, because that affords the fewest temptations for sinning against God.

This is worth observing, because many may be ready to join with the prophet in his petition, who yet will not pray with him,
if

if they do not pray like him, and not only ask the same thing, but ask it for the same reason. There are several reasons for which a middle condition in life may appear eligible, but none so proper to make the foundation of our petition to God for it as this, which the prophet has chosen. We may choose the middle state because we do not care for the anxiety of a high one, or, because we are averse to the drudgery and disgrace of a low one; but these are not suitable reasons to lay before the Governor of the world, because they imply a reluctance which does not become us, and shew that we are loth to undertake a trouble which yet God may think fit to set before us. But when we choose the middle state, not for the natural but for the moral advantages attending it, we certainly place our choice on a more commendable principle, and may safely venture to make it the subject of our request to God, as it rather implies a pious desire of pleasing him than a forward one of pleasing ourselves.

It is our Saviour's direction and command that we should pray, not to be led into temptation;—and if one condition in life lays more temptations in our way than another, prudence

dence will lead us to avoid it, and religion allows that we should ask to be delivered from it.

From the general principle on which this petition is built, let us proceed to the particular reasons which support it.

The prophet thinks his religious behaviour will be more secure in a middle state—because,

1. On the one hand, affluence may fill him with pride, and lead him to forget his dependence upon God.

2. On the other hand, want may force him to break through the laws which God hath appointed, and to defy his authority in order to relieve it.

Two main points in religion are—a trust in God's providence for what we want—and, a grateful acknowledgment for what we already enjoy from him.

There is, 'tis true, sufficient reason whereon we may build these duties in every condition of life, as there is no condition, wherein we have not something to ask of God, as well as something to thank him for; nor does the prophet's petition imply, that the discharge of these duties is confined to the middle state of life. But from viewing the
ordinary

ordinary behaviour of mankind in the two extreme conditions of affluence and poverty, he had observed, and we may observe the same, that the more we enjoy from the hand of Providence, the more remiss we are apt to be in paying him our proper acknowledgments by a behaviour answerable to the blessings we enjoy; and the more we want, the less disposed we are to wait till he gives it. Affluence makes us careless, and leads us to neglect God; — need makes us desperate, and prompts us to defy him. — If these observations be true, the reasons which support the prophet's petition are just, and it is with great propriety he chooses that station in life where he may be supplied with so much of this world's good, as not to distrust God's providence, but not with so much as to make him forget it: with enough to make him easy, but not with so much as to make him proud.

As to the first of the prophet's reasons — however unnatural it may seem, that the more we receive from God the less mindful we are of him, yet it is too often true; experience shews the fact, and a little reflection will find the cause of it, though not an excuse for it. — Here lies the mischief:—

I. What

1. What we possess without trouble, we enjoy without reflection; and the blessing that comes unearned, goes unthanked.

Labour is not so hard a lot, as it is a useful lesson to mankind. This makes us remember whence we have the blessings we enjoy; and, being accustomed to send our thoughts beyond ourselves in acquiring them, we learn to look beyond ourselves in the possession of them. The man who is at the trouble to contrive, and is anxious for success in what he aims at—who feels a want of assistance to get at it, and begs of God to afford him that assistance—no sooner obtains the blessing he has been toiling for, but he feels a reason for thanking the hand which helped him to it. But when we sit at ease, and, without the trouble of contriving or the pain of doubting, find the blessings of life flow in as fast as we can apply them, we have no leisure to send our enquiries to know from whence they come, nor are we apt to look backward for a cause, to which we do not feel ourselves obliged.

2. What we enjoy without reflection, we are extremely apt to misapply; for when we have forgot the author from whom our affluence proceeds, we naturally look upon it as
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our own; and, under that persuasion, instead of applying it to the purposes for which it is sent us, we apply it in pleasing ourselves. An affluent state lays variety of pleasures before us; and, when we feel it in our power to take our share of them, and have been long used to look no higher than our own inclination for the direction of our wealth, we easily employ it to fetch in the pleasures to which we think we have a right. Thus voluptuousness compleats what covetousness had begun; and when the heart has once lost the reflection which points out its dependence upon God, voluptuousness prevents the recovery of it, by crowding in all the variety of thoughts which vice and vanity can supply, and leaving no room for its return. When vice and vanity have got possession of the heart, we direct our pursuits a different way from that where reason and religion would direct us, and, if we meet them accidentally, are more inclined to question their authority than to follow their advice.

Thus, from forgetting God, too many learn to deny him — and the affluence, which they have received at his hand, and for his purposes, they turn against him. And, as the

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more God pours in upon them the more they forget him — so when they have forgot him, and run into a misapplication of what he has given them, the more they have the more they abuse him.

Thus affluence makes us careless in directing our thoughts to God, and carelessness leads us to forget our dependence upon him. This forgetfulness of God confines our thoughts to ourselves, and establishes pride; — and pride is ever attended with ingratitude, which does worse than blast the good it meets with; it ripens it into mischief, and the more blessings it finds the more mischief it works with them.

Example prevails more than reason, and it were a shorter way of proving the truth of the prophet's observation, to shew by experience that it is true, than to shew by reason that it *must be* true. — But every man may satisfy himself of this without assistance; and we may well be excused the pursuit of a topic, which might be too severe to be welcome, and is too commonly observed to need illustrating.

Affluence and vice, it is true, are not necessarily and always united, and there are many examples, where the bounties of Providence are neither unthanked nor misapplied; but

but where a religious acceptance, and as generous an application of them, reflect an honour both to God and the possessor, and shew at once a desire both to thank and to imitate the divine goodness from whence they flow.

But such instances are not so common, as to destroy the propriety of the observation we have been considering; nor is it less true that affluence has many natural temptations to lead us from a dependence upon God, because some are strong enough to withstand them.—Still there are too many examples on the other side, which shew that religion is not only neglected but despised.—It is our Saviour's observation, that "a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven:"—there are difficulties in a high and wealthy state, with respect to those attainments that are necessary to qualify us for the next world, to which men of lower rank are not at all, or much less, exposed. Riches give men the possession of every thing that serves to gratify fleshly appetite; and when pleasure calls and invites, and no present obstacle stands in the way, it is hard to refuse. The manners, the customs, the occupations of men of fortune, if they do not obstruct or destroy virtue and religion, as they

they too frequently do, have little in them that serves to cherish and improve them. Virtue and religion thrive only in serious and thinking minds, influenced by the fear and reverence of God and the hopes of a life to come. Wealth draws another way, and suggests different sentiments, either distracting men with cares, or softening them by luxury, or letting them loose to vain amusements, various in their kinds, as invention, ever at work to minister to the passions and follies of mankind, is able to furnish them. Look into the world, and see what is the whole life of many but one entire void, where pleasure and worldly business succeed by turns and wholly engross the mind—Is this to be qualified for the kingdom of God, to be constantly fed with a supply of sensual pleasure?—or may we look for religion among those, where God hath showered his blessings till he is forgotten, where the question in the prophet's petition is not so much as put, and they even refuse to ask—"who is the Lord?"

We should now consider the second particular reason which supports the prophet's petition, and from the dangers which attend an affluent state should next examine those which belong to a needy one.—But this I beg leave to defer to another opportunity.

S E R M O N XXI.

The same Subject continued.

PROVERBS xxx. 8, 9.

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: — lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

IN my last discourse I first settled the propriety of this petition, and shewed, that although God appoints us our several conditions in life, in consequence of which it is our duty to take that, whatever it be, which he appoints us, yet there is no impropriety in our praying to him for one condition preferably to another, provided we pray for it in submission to his will and direction.

The propriety of the petition thus settled, I proceeded to consider the general principle,

from which it arises, and the particular reasons on which it is supported.

The general principle from which the petition arises, I observed, is a religious one. The prophet chooses the middle condition of life, because that affords the fewest temptations for sinning against God. This, I said, is worth observing, because many may be ready to join with the prophet in his petition, who yet will not pray with him, if they do not pray like him, and not only ask the same thing, but ask it for the same reason.

From the general principle, on which the petition is made, I proceeded to the particular reasons which support it.—The prophet thinks his religious behaviour will be more secure in a middle state, because, on the one hand, -affluence may lead him to forget his dependence upon God;—on the other hand, poverty may lead him to defy his authority, and break through his laws to come at relief.

With respect to the first of these reasons, I took notice, that however unnatural it may seem, that the more we receive from God the less mindful we are of him, yet it is too often true. Experience shews the fact, and a little reflection will shew the cause. Here, I observed, lies the mischief:—What we possess without

without trouble, we enjoy without reflection; — and what we enjoy without reflection, we are extremely apt to misapply.

Vice and vanity dwell in the regions of affluence. These lead us to a forgetfulness of God; and a forgetfulness of God confines our thoughts to ourselves, and establishes pride; — and pride is ever attended with ingratitude. — Virtue and religion, I observed, thrive only in serious and thinking minds, influenced by the fear and reverence of God, and the hopes of a life to come; wealth draws another way, and suggests different sentiments — either distracting men with cares, or softening them by luxury, or letting them loose to vain amusements, and feeding them with a constant supply of sensual pleasure — till the question in the prophet's petition is not so much as put, and they even refuse to ask — “who is the Lord?”

We will now consider the second particular reason which supports the prophet's petition — and, after viewing the dangers which attend an affluent state, will look at those which belong to a needy one.

The temptations on this side differ from those on the other, only in this respect, that they lead to sins of a different nature; not

that the temptations themselves are stronger or weaker, or that the sins, to which they lead, are more or less excusable, than those which belong to an affluent state. For all sins are in this respect equal, that they are all forbidden by the same authority; and all temptations are so far equal, that they may all be withstood if we will exert what lies in our power;—for God suffers no man to be tempted above what he is able to bear.

The moral and religious dangers attending a state of poverty are, 1. The maintaining a distrust in God's providence; and, 2. The taking any steps, in defiance of his authority, in order to relieve it.

The particular sins which the prophet mentions, as laying in the way of poverty, are, theft, and false swearing. The propriety in connecting these two sins together (besides the natural relation subsisting between them) arises from a practice under the law of Moses, by which any one, who was suspected of theft, was obliged to clear himself before the judges by an oath; so that perjury was frequently the consequence of theft.

Mankind and their actions are ever the same; it is still true, that want often prompts men to invade each other's property, and that

one sin generally introduces many more in order to conduct and conceal it. We see every day to what fatal lengths, and through what a course of iniquity, men run to satisfy the demands which their distresses raise upon them.

Not that poverty necessarily carries these effects with it; for, as it affords the properest opportunities, so it affords the strongest examples, of trust in God and reverence for his authority. But these dangers are nevertheless really subsisting, though many are wise enough to avoid them. Poverty is a severe lot; — but what makes men dissatisfied under it, and drives them to wicked practices for their relief, is a severity of their own sharpening. If the demands of nature be strong, they are neither extensive nor voracious; and the want in which Providence thinks fit to place men, seldom lies beyond the reach of honest methods of relief. But the appetites of nature may be heightened by our management of them, and the want men suffer may not only be of their own procuring, but the severity of it may arise from artificial appetites of their own making. We scarce meet an object of distress who has not more appetites than simple nature will own as her's; and were we to fol-

low the charity which their distress often draws from us, we should find it directed in providing for more appetites than they are obliged to maintain. The genuine wants of nature afford but little work to supply them, and Providence seldom refuses means for relieving them; but when we have the vices and the passions to gratify, we have more to do, and Providence is less concerned to assist us.

Hence arises that severity in poverty which makes men dissatisfied, and drives them into wicked practices for their relief. It is this leads them to repine at God's providence, from whom they are apt to expect whatever they want, without considering what it is, and why they want it. And when they are disappointed of those proofs of it which they desire, they grow dissatisfied even with those which he has already given them. They are first angry at God's government, and then despise it.

Under this disposition, when men are uneasy at feeling more wants than they can satisfy, they are more apt to send their thoughts forward towards any means of relief that offers, than they are to send them inward to remove the want itself; and when vice creates the
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the want, and sends us out for means to relieve it, the wickedness of the method is not likely to be any objection against the application of it. Nor will human laws have any effect, in restraining men from the execution of such purposes, farther than as they can inflict immediate punishment; for when men have broke through the authority of God and reason within them, there is no principle, on which the outward authority of mankind can stop them, but the principle of fear: but when vice has once set men on its work, it is very industrious to help them through it, and will either prompt them with a hardness to defy human authority, or with cunning enough to deceive it.

With these dispositions, men become their own providers, and fetch the supplies they want from any one's property, without any other consideration than that they want it. And when any one sin is judged to be a proper method for supplying such wants, any other sin may be judged necessary to support it. And thus many are led on through a course of villainy till they fall into destruction; nor will they stop at any villainy that comes in their way, the greatest that can be committed, after they have once brought themselves to judge

judge of vices, not by their malignity, but by their use in conducting their purposes.

I need not take notice how much experience proves the truth of these observations, and justifies the prophet's petition for being protected from the dangers of poverty. Every day convinces us, that poverty, ill conducted, lays men open to a variety of vices, no less mischievous to society than offensive to God. The poverty which the hand of Providence lays upon us, when borne with a becoming trust and humility, is productive of such behaviour as will recommend us to the favour both of God and of mankind; and though every state of trial, as such, is a state of difficulty, and therefore not in its nature eligible, yet when the trial of poverty is set before us, there are those virtues within its reach which will soften its pressure, if we refer ourselves to his will who appoints it, and take care to shorten our appetites, as God hath thought fit to shorten our abundance. But when men's vices steep them in poverty, and their unreasonable appetites enlarge the wants of nature, poverty is productive of the worst mischiefs, with the least excuse; and sets men at defiance with all authority human or divine.

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The prophet's petition then was a pious and prudent one. He chooses that condition in life, which is least attended with those temptations, which usually betray men into a want of gratitude to God, or a want of trust in him — which, as they are the main duties of religion, so are the most effectual ingredients of human happiness. It is the least part of the lesson which this petition suggests, that our natural or political ease is best secured in a situation above want and below splendor, though that is true, and desirable; but, it is the prophet's wish to have his virtue and religion secured, well knowing, that they afford the best support in our passage through this life. No state of human life is exempt from cares and disquietudes; and if the middle state hath the fewest, it has too many to permit us to be happy in it without the assistance of virtue and religion. In this state indeed we are most open to that assistance, and it is for that reason highly eligible, as it secures us the best means for supporting ourselves under the troubles of this life, and the best title for our happiness in the next.

When Providence has furnished us with the necessities and conveniences of life, he has done sufficient

sufficient to encourage us to our duty. For, if it be reasonable to pursue virtue upon the distant prospect of a future reward, even through the hardest calamities that can beset us here, how much more reasonable is it to do so when we already feel a present reward, and which too is not only a reward but an assistance—as it removes the difficulties which are apt to dishearten us in our progress, when, though we feel ourselves virtuous, we still feel ourselves miserable?

Again; when Providence has placed us, not only above the discouragements, which cast a damp upon our virtue and religion, but likewise beneath those temptations which are apt to surfeit them, what can we want from God to render our duty secure? Or, what have we not within us and about us, to make us as happy here as the present condition of human nature will permit?

Let such, then, as are placed in the middle state of life, be careful not to abuse the advantages belonging to it; and, as they are set above the inconveniences of want, and below the vanities of affluence, let it be their care to keep themselves free from the vices of both. As God has done his part to make them easy, it is theirs to make themselves good;

good ; and, without debasing their condition by the meaner vices of poverty, or poisoning it with the profligate vanities of affluence, to make it the employment, as it is the encouragement, of their virtue — that so, they may be the best among mankind, whose condition is the best in human life,

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It is the duty of the nation to provide for the education of its youth, and to this end it is necessary that the government should take the lead. The government should provide for the education of its youth, and to this end it is necessary that the government should take the lead.

S E R M O N XXII.

F O R G E T F U L N E S S O F G O D I N
P R O S P E R I T Y,

 L U K E xvi. 19.

*There was a certain rich man, which was clothed
in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously
every day.*

H E R E we have the description of one,
who enjoys the goods things of life:—
It follows, “ And there was a certain beggar,
“ named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate
“ full of sores, and desiring to be fed with
“ the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s
“ table.” — Here we have the description of
one, who suffers the evil things of life.

This seems to be merely a representation of
the two opposite conditions, without entering
into the moral character of the persons de-
scribed, For though there doubtless was
something

something wrong in the rich man's conduct, and something meritorious in the poor man—as appears by the different treatment they met with afterwards — yet it surely lay not in the circumstances here set forth. The rich man is described as wearing fine apparel, and keeping a sumptuous table ; — this is no more than what rich men may do, and what they ought to do. The poor man is described, as full of sores — in which there is misery, indeed, but no merit ; he is represented as an object truly pitiable, and it is not said, that he did not meet with pity ; he is laid, indeed, at the rich man's gate ; where, however, he might be sufficiently relieved, and more suitably than at the rich man's table ; the broken meat of which if he desired, he desired all that his condition entitled him to expect—and it does not appear that this was refused him. In short, there seems to be nothing in this description, from whence we may draw matter of reproach in the rich man, or matter of commendation in the poor one ; the circumstances mentioned are naturally descriptive of affluence and poverty, and, taken by themselves, shew no more than that the good things of this life are unequally dispensed, that some enjoy themselves in the gratifications

tions which wealth affords, whilst others are poor and miserable.

But it is not the design of the parable to shew us no more than this, which we see every day; the next step in it shews us farther, what is not less true, though it be less noticed — that our conditions in the next life may be the reverse of what we meet with in the present; — for thus it follows — “It came
“to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom :
“the rich man also died, and was buried ;
“and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in
“torments.”

Here we are led to conclude, that there was something faulty in the rich man, and something commendable in the poor one ; for we cannot suppose, that the former was thrown into hell merely because he was rich, or that the latter was carried into Abraham’s bosom merely because he was poor ; but we must conclude, that, because they behaved differently in their respective conditions in this life, therefore they met with this different appointment in the next ; which conclusion points directly at the general duty of behaving as becomes us in our respective conditions. — It should indeed check that pride and vanity,

which is too apt to spring up in the sunshine of abundance, when we consider, not only that the good things of this life are of very short duration, but also, that the abuse of them leads to a reverse of condition in the next. As, on the other hand, it is a comfort to those, who feel the cold hand of poverty upon them, when they reflect, that, if they set themselves with cheerfulness and contentment to the duties of their station, the time is not far distant, when they shall experience the change of misery for happiness.

But pride and vanity, so natural to an affluent condition, too often draw after them, what is still worse, a neglect, if not a contempt, of religion; — and this seems to have been the capital fault of the rich man in the parable before us. Though his enjoyments, in themselves, might not be blameable, yet he was highly so, if, in his attention to them, he was led to forget God, and to neglect, perhaps disbelieve, the truths which religion set before him — truths, which, however men may attempt to hide, they cannot extinguish, and however they may turn away their eyes from looking at them now, they must one day lift them up and see them to their confusion.

confusion. The rich man in the parable saw them not whilst sitting at his sumptuous board, but “in hell he lifted up his eyes, being
“in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off,
“and Lazarus in his bosom;” — he saw that happiness afar off, and not to be come at, which he once had within his reach, and he sensibly felt that punishment, which perhaps he had once derided. In this dreadful situation he first solicits his own relief, and begs of Abraham “to send Lazarus, that he
“might dip the tip of his finger in water to
“cool his tongue” — but in vain; — Abraham, instead of granting his request, both useless and impracticable, sends him to his reflections — “Remember, Son, that thou in
“thy life-time receivedst thy good things,
“and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now
“he is comforted, and thou art tormented” — tormented, not because the good things of life had been his lot, but because in the use of them he did not look up to him who gave them, or consider what might be his portion in another life.—The rich man, finding no relief was to be had for himself in his present painful condition, turns his thoughts to those he had left behind him — “I pray thee,
“then, that thou wouldest send him to my

“ father’s house ; for I have five brethren ;
“ that he may testify unto them, lest they
“ also come into this place of torment.”—

We see now what was the rich man’s fault, by the description he gives of his family, whose character was doubtless like his own ; they believed not a future state — nor did he, till he now found it to his cost ; and therefore he is desirous, that his brethren, who were infidels like himself, might be favoured with an extraordinary message from the dead for their conviction, that they might not share his fate, and meet their conviction in their condemnation.

We see then the true aim of the parable, and the lesson it is intended to teach us. It shews us, that the enjoyment of riches is apt to lead men to forget God ; for when men have every thing about them that they can wish or enjoy, they are very apt to think they want nothing from God, and consequently they feel no desire of pleasing him ; the more they are surrounded with the indulgences of fortune (as they are called) the more they feel a power of doing as they like ; and when such power is solicited by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life — by ambition, luxury, or covetousness — there needs
more

more constancy for withstanding their call, than belongs to those, who, by a neglect of religion, if not a contempt of it, are strangers to God and his assistance. The pride of life alone, without the grosser indulgences that often attend it, is an enemy to religious thought and reflection, and, in the fond display of their superiority above others, makes men forget their own dependence upon God, which being the very basis and support of humility, the removal of it makes room for pride to take possession of the mind, with all its train of false and arrogant speculation; — which, under the title of liberal and free reasoning, throws contempt on the honour and worship of God, treats religion as fit only for the vulgar (a state device to keep them in order) but not worthy the regard of great and free spirits — however, for decency sake, they may bear with the religion which the laws of their country have established.

This seems to have been the character of the rich man in the parable before us — he had no religion; — a character which did not die with him, and which, if it naturally springs up in an affluent state, as the parable represents, is a good reason why they should be contented with their allotment, who, if

they are placed out of the indulgences of wealth, find themselves placed within the comforts of religion. There are many considerations, which recommend the moderate stations of life, but none of more weight than this — that they best keep us to our acquaintance with God; who is indeed a father to us all, and finds in us the natural behaviour of children, who are ever best kept to their obedience by moderate favour, but too often turn ungrateful under indulgence.

Whilst the bounties of Providence arise before us, as the consequence and reward of our industry, we feel them as encouragements, and, under the influence of that sense, are more inclined to look up to the hand from whence they come, than when they surround us without our care or thought in procuring them; for then we feel not the hand which gives them, and consequently feel no call of thanks; we think them our own, and we use them as such. The moderate bounties too of Providence are such, that we can see around them and beyond them, can see them lying on uncertain ground, in close neighbourhood with what may diminish or destroy them; — at least, being sensible of the hand which gave, we cannot be insensible that the same
hand

hand can take away. This keeps us humble, and consequently keeps us to religion; and the sense of our dependence upon God, and his favour, prompts us with a desire and care of pleasing him.—But when the bounties of Providence are heaped around them, men see not beyond them, are apprehensive of no change, —no danger; as they felt not the hand which gave—they think not of the hand which can take away. This encourages pride —makes them forget their dependence on the favour of God—and, confining their thoughts to themselves only, prompts them with the study of pleasing themselves only.

But, if the favour of God be that, on which we must depend for our happiness, as surely it is, if God created us —religion, *i. e.* a study to please and obey God, must be our title to that favour; and any common understanding can discern, that where an affluent condition spoils men of their religion, it greatly overbalances all the enjoyments it can set before them; since, however it may supply them with enjoyments, it robs them of their happiness: nor will it require more philosophy, than what lies in the principle of self-preservation, to make us content with a moderate condition, where we meet with the

reasonable enjoyments of life, and where, if we meet not the more splendid ones, which belong only to this transitory scene, we are however more in the way of what will lead us to the eternal happiness of heaven.

Even the low and afflicted conditions of human life have this good, to set against the evil they contain — that they are, naturally, productive of religion; for if the love of the world be, as it surely is, the greatest obstruction to the growth of religion in our hearts, we may well expect its greatest vigour, where there is the least love of the world to check it, which surely must be in a heart laden with the afflictions of the world. As the affluent man looks within himself, and no farther, for what he enjoys; so the poor and distressed look around them for help under what they suffer; and, finding with how slow a pace, and in how scanty measure, it comes from the hand of man, they naturally look up and apply themselves to a higher and more ready hand: such are more likely to be acquainted with a God they want, than the affluent man is to be acquainted with a God he does not know; — and Providence sometimes chooses this, as a suitable means for bringing men to a knowledge of him,

him, that, when prosperity has led them to forget him, adversity may make them acknowledge him in their want of him. It is true, poverty and affliction do not always bear this fruit; nor, on the other hand, is affluence always barren of it: there are, God be praised! many good and religious among the rich; and there are, we too well know, many profligate among the poor; — yet the observation on the two conditions is just, that affluence tends to spoil our religion, and poverty to promote it, notwithstanding some particular instances, where good minds stand untainted with the one, and bad minds remain incorrigible under the other.

Amidst the avocations of affluence we find, if not a struggle, yet occasion for vigilance and resolution, in keeping up our acquaintance with God; but when thrown into affliction, we fly to him with alacrity and without hindrance — and if we do not find immediate deliverance from what we suffer, we find reasons for submission, and strength of mind for a patient resignation to the will and appointment of God. — We may suppose the cripple in the parable to represent such a character, and that he sustained his miserable condition with a religious mind — that his
merit

merit lay not in his poverty and sores, but in his patience and resignation; as, on the other hand, the crime of the rich man was not, his purple and fine linen, and sumptuous table, but, his want of religion.—These two characters, thus contrasted, suggest this lesson—that a poor man with religion is more acceptable to God, than a rich man without—and, that, however such poor men may suffer in this life, they shall be happy in the next; whilst such rich men as the parable describes, however they may enjoy themselves here, will be miserable hereafter.

So necessary is religion, in all stations of life, that without it the highest will prove our condemnation, and with it the lowest will lead to happiness. Those who despise religion may learn from this parable, that a time will come, when they shall repent of it, which, if it arrives not in this life, will come too late in the next; when all wishes for the means of salvation which they have neglected, will be as fruitless as any demands they may now raise for other means than those which are already before them. Wicked men may deceive themselves, under the desperate vanity of thinking that the common proofs of the truth and authority of
our

our religion are insufficient, and that, till they meet with such proofs as shall be strong enough for their conviction, they are justified in rejecting what is unsatisfactory. — This might be the sentiment of the rich man and of his brethren, as appears from his request to Abraham — that he would send one to them from the dead. — Abraham rejects this proposal as unnecessary, as they already had Moses and the prophets for their instruction. The rich man, who experimentally knew, that this means of convincing them might be ineffectual, through obstinacy, repeats his request; which Abraham again rejects, not only as unnecessary, but as not likely to succeed — “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”

It is remarkable, how this was verified in the conduct of the Jews, among whom Christ rose from the dead, and yet they did not believe in him; — and those among us, who are not satisfied with the evidence for Christianity which Christ's resurrection affords, will hardly find stronger evidence in the resurrection of any one else from the dead. The truth is — when men's unbelief or disregard of Christianity arises, not from the want of evidence in
its

its favour, but from something else; the addition of more evidence can work nothing towards their better faith or respect, for it touches not the true cause of the defect; and the addition of what is in its nature a much less evidence (as being much more exceptionable), would not only be ineffectual for producing conviction, but might work a quite contrary effect.

The conclusion is obvious — That we diligently apply the means which God hath given us for our salvation, since it is absurd to demand more, and will be fatal to neglect what we have; — and, that in whatever station of life we are placed, we take care not to lose our religion; — a duty which our Creator and Redeemer have appointed for our guidance through this life, and without which we shall not be admitted into the happiness of the next.

SERMON

S E R M O N XXIII.

VAIN PROFESSIONS OF RELIGION.

MATTHEW xxi. 28, 29, 30, 31.

A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard; he answereth and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise; and he answered and said, I go, sir, and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

NOTHING more true, than that those who repent, and turn to duty, are more commendable than those who promise largely and do nothing; — and this parable of our Saviour, as it gives great encouragement to the former, so it throws just reproach upon the

the latter; — such, in the first instance, were the Jews, who, under the divine revelation they enjoyed, made great boast of their advantages, and consequently great profession of duty — yet did not the will of God, but rejected the gospel of Christ; whilst the Gentiles, whom the Jews marked as the worst of sinners, with humble repentance applied themselves to it for salvation, and succeeded.

But the parable farther applies to us, who profess Christianity, but do not live up to its precepts. Such profession strongly expresses the son's answer in the parable — “I go, sir;” and, considered merely by itself, strongly obliges us to act according to it; but, when considered under certain circumstances of advantage, belonging to our condition and station in life, gives additional strength to the obligation of thinking and acting accordingly, in proportion as such circumstances better enable us to know and to perform our duty.

A good education is a very advantageous circumstance of condition, which strengthens our obligation to duty; and they who are so happy to meet with it, have largely promised to be good. Their sense of duty, their present practice of it, their present relish of it,

are circumstances, which strictly engage them to future obedience, as these fully shew their knowledge and their ability for performing it; and they should be exceeding jealous in the preservation of such principles; fully assured, as they may be, that they will live to want them, and that it will require all their care to keep them. For the safest paths in life have dangers which threaten their virtue and religion. Artful insinuations to the discredit of religion, specious apologies for vice, will meet them in almost every conversation; and, in proportion as they neglect to call their education in aid to repel such poison—but more especially if they set it aside, to be conformable to their company—they will find their passions gather strength, vice will gradually appear less odious, and religion more troublesome, till those principles, with which, as with a life-guard, they set out from home, are contemptuously discharged as a cumbersome retinue.

As we advance in life, we find our obligation to duty increasing, in proportion to the opportunities and abilities we meet with of performing it. It is reasonably to be presumed, that the older we grow the wiser we grow;

grow; and, as men advance in years, Providence generally so orders it, that they advance into larger spheres of duty. Wherever we find ourselves in the world, we hear the call of religion—and the instruction afforded us in our early years is not a more powerful obligation for following it, than the wisdom and experience we feel from more advanced years.

There are many who, having passed through a good education, do not immediately discharge themselves of it upon their entrance into the world; but advance forward, till to the advantage of a good education, which they owe to their parents, they add the farther advantage of good sense and experience, which they have acquired of themselves.—Such feel, or should feel, a most powerful call to duty, and must be understood as most strictly engaged to comply with it.

It is true, the farther we advance into the world, and the larger our acquaintance grows with the objects of it, the more we have to do to keep a due balance between our interest in this world, and our interest in the next.—When the engagements of life crowd thick about us, it may be difficult to keep virtue
and

and religion so near to us as they have been, and they may be in danger of being displaced, if not lost, in the crowd. Our thoughts, which hitherto have had little call from the objects of religion, are now divided between them and the objects of the world; and we feel a competition within us, which we felt not so sensibly before — a competition which there must be, so long as we are inhabitants of this world, and at the same time expect to be inhabitants of another; — and in the nice management of which competition lies the great secret of living right.

The man of business is apt to favour one side of this competition too much, and to employ more thought upon his concerns here, than upon his expectations hereafter. What is present and before him, strikes his attention, and claims his compliance, more forcibly than what is at a distance. Hence it is that, when the business of life carries his attention from the business of religion, and he first teaches himself to comply upon a reason of necessity (because one must be followed now, the other may be followed by and by), he afterwards, by degrees, and frequent compliances, grows more and more indifferent about

the matter, till less and less important businesses, or even the amusements of life, claim the like compliance from him in preference to the business of religion.

So that, though such men have very fairly promised to work in God's vineyard, and to go where religion calls them, yet they do not go — and why? — because they have something else to do. — They have a very good veneration for religion, yet overlook many parts of their conduct, that are not consistent with it, and which plainly shew, that, though they approve of religion, they are governed by something else. They believe there will be a future state; but are resolved, in the mean time, to make the most of the present; in consequence of which belief and resolution they are ready to give their testimony on the side of religion, when it falls in their way, but are loth to be led out of their way to serve it. They believe in the gospel of Christ, and really think it of use as a qualification for the next world; but, finding it rather an incumbrance in this, they sit loose to the application, in hopes, that their profession of it will save their credit here, and that they shall have time, after the business of the world is over, to take up the application

cation of it for securing their interest hereafter.

But if we will not let religion govern us, it will hardly serve us; if we set it aside, for the present, as a hindrance in our concerns of this life, we shall with difficulty resume it afterwards, for promoting our interest in the next.

But how is religion a hindrance in our engagements of this life? — If our engagements be the reasonable business of the world, religion is so far from being a hindrance, that it is a great assistance to us. To serve God, and to honour him, is the surest way to be served and honoured by him; and the religious man, if he is not always sure of that success which he wishes, of which he is no competent judge, may be always sure of that which he really wants, of which God is a sufficient judge; and there is not a wilder mistake that men commit, than when they turn their backs upon God, to provide for themselves without his direction — as if they were wiser than God, and better knew what they wanted, or as if they were more powerful than God, and could reach what they wanted without his leave. — This is certain, that as a regard to religion is our best assistance in the reasonable

business of life, so it is our best guard and security against being involved in the unreasonable engagements of it. The man who is scrupulous to carve out his own good without God's direction, is safe from seeking it by methods contrary to his commands; but he who has once set aside God, with indifference, in pursuit of his reasonable wants, may, in time, defy him, to come at his unreasonable wishes.

But the farther men advance in the world, the more apt are they to think they are sent into it only to serve themselves, and to forget, that their main business in life is to serve God. Every improvement of station and condition in the world is additional work in God's vineyard, to which he calls us, and which we engage to do; but which we can never discharge with propriety, if we lay aside our religion; which keeps us attentive to God and his purposes; and which, the higher we advance in life, more strongly claims our regard.—God should be honoured and served, in proportion to the blessings he bestows;—besides which, it is a very strong reason why men should heighten their care of religion as their condition is heightened, that they have more occasion for its service. Their business,
their

their pleasures, their seducements are greater; and, wherever men are most in danger to forget God, they surely have most occasion to be reminded of him. On their own account then, and for their own safety, the higher men get in the world the more careful they should be of their religion; for which, however, there is a still farther reason, arising from their connection with others, who will take either just offence, or pernicious example, from their neglect of it.

This reflection, were it proper to pursue it, might carry us among men of literature and high stations, who have a powerful call to God's work, in cultivating religion in themselves, and promoting it in others;—their obligation and engagement to follow this work is great, and great will be their defect, if, instead of being found in the vineyard of God, they be seen running after the prevailing calls of vanity and ambition.

But, leaving such to their pursuits, let us take the reflection to ourselves, as there is no station in life, wherein, if men will think a little, they will not be sensible, how much they have undertaken to do, and how strong a call to religion they feel from the blessings and abilities God hath given them; nor do any stand so

low, but, when he surveys his influences and connections about him, will find, that, so far as they reach, he stands an example to others, whose conduct will be affected by what he shews them of his own.

To draw towards a conclusion —

A little recollection will satisfy us, that the son in the parable, who said “ I go, sir, but “ went not,” truly represents what we all, more or less, truly feel within ourselves — more alacrity in resolving upon duty, than care in the discharge of it.

This, which is a common frailty, is not for that reason to be disregarded, but the more carefully to be heeded and remedied. That we are frail creatures in all our attempts, is true ; but it is strange to observe how ashamed we are of this circumstance, belonging to our nature, in all other instances but that of religious duty — where we confidently plead it in our defence, and encourage each other to disregard it; not considering, that the religion God hath set us is expressly calculated for the use of frail and sinful creatures — consequently, to excuse our neglect of it, because we are frail and sinful, is highly absurd.

The truth is, human frailty is not an ex-

cuse for our neglect of religion; neither is it such cause of it as need hinder our salvation, since there are remedies against it, if we will apply them, which, though they will not make us perfect, will however make us acceptable to God. Our religion holds forth to us great remedies against our frailty, in the gracious offers of accepting our repentance, and assisting us with divine grace; which if we faithfully ask, we may effectually obtain. Thus much God has thought necessary for our weakness; and this, if we have recourse to it, we shall find sufficient—not to secure us from sin, but to secure us from being overcome by it. It is therefore not our frailty, but our neglect of those means, to which we should have recourse for remedies against it, that is the true cause of so much irresolution and miscarriage in duty. In their serious minutes men think right, and they resolve right; but, if they do no more than think and resolve—if they have not recourse to prayer, and other religious means appointed for their help and security—the first temptations that fall in their way may overset them; and, if they accustom themselves to disregard such relapses, as the effect of human frailty, and seek not pardon of them by repentance, and assisting

grace by prayer, their frailty will not excuse past transgression, and will assuredly betray them into more.

Certainly, our best remedy against fickleness in the discharge of our duty, and the surest support of our good resolutions, is when we have recourse to divine aid for bringing them into action. We may and should employ our reason, and if we employ it honestly and humbly, the more sensibly shall we feel our want of assistance, and the more inclined shall we be to apply for the best. We are not to *discard* reason, but we are not to *rely* upon it. This may sound harsh, to those who are fond of the rational character of man, and are not for adding any thing more to it. But, with their leave, man is a religious, as well as a rational creature—and the same Creator, who gave him reason, has given him a command, to pray to him for his assistance in the use of it. If we trust wholly to our reason for our good conduct (harsh as the assertion may seem), we may be betrayed; for right reason is not always at hand to direct us, and what we commonly call reason is not to be trusted. Our passions and appetites will often obstruct true reason; and false reason will plead in their behalf.

No!

No! we are then only safe, when we have God on our right hand;—and our good resolutions are then only steady and successful, when we humbly pray to God—that he would
‘direct, sanctify, and govern both our hearts
‘and bodies, in the ways of his laws, and
‘in the works of his commandments, that
‘through his most mighty protection, both
‘here and ever, we may be preserved in body
‘and soul, through our Lord and Saviour
‘Jesus Christ.’ To whom, &c.

Gen. 27. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52.

And we have
God on our right hand—
those are then only
we humbly pray to God—that he would
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and soul, through our Lord and Saviour
Jesus Christ, to whom be
all glory, honor, and praise, forever and ever,
Amen.

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Amen.

SHRMON

S E R M O N XXIV.

FEAR OF GOD.

TITUS ii. 11, 12, 13.

The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

WE have here a short summary of Christian duty; pointing out at the same time the temptations which may lead to a neglect of it, and the great reward which will attend a diligent discharge of it. Christian duty respects God, our neighbour, and ourselves—and comes under the denominations of Piety, Justice, and Sobriety. The temptations that may lead to a neglect of these duties,
are

are the lusts of the world ; and the reward that will attend a diligent discharge of them, is eternal happiness with God and Christ in heaven.

Piety towards God, or, as we term it, godliness, is the best security of all duty ; as the want of it, *i. e.* ungodliness, is the natural foundation of all wickedness. If we have no regard for God, our regard for our neighbour or ourselves will have no merit, and we lay exposed to the influence of every passion that may draw us from our duty.

The first thing which our piety towards God suggests, is to render him all that honour and regard which is due to him, and which is understood in the general notion of worship ;—this is due to the majesty and supremacy of God, and ought to be paid to him, and to him alone.

God hath so manifested himself in his works, of creation and providence — and so fully revealed himself in his word, the gospel of his Son Christ Jesus, in the work of our redemption—that we cannot be ignorant who he is, to whom we owe our worship, and how justly it is due to him. For it is observable, that in the revelations God hath made of himself, he assumes his several titles from the
several

several eminent blessings he hath bestowed upon mankind. At first, whilst the memory of the creation was yet fresh on men's minds, God distinguished himself by no other title than the possessor of heaven and earth; — thus, when Melchisedec blessed Abram, he said, “Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth.” Gen. xiv. 19. — Afterwards, when a new blessing accrued, in the covenant which God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their posterity, another title is assumed, and God calls himself, “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Exod. iii. 6. — When God gave the Israelites the law from mount Sinai, he takes his title from his late deliverance of them from their bondage in Egypt — “I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” Exod. xx. 2. — And now, among Christians, God is distinguished by a title taken from the greatest of all his blessings, our redemption, and is called, “God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” — That God, then — who created heaven and earth — who entered into covenant with Abraham and his posterity — who led the Israelites out of Egypt — and who is “the Father of our Lord

"Lord Jesus Christ"—is, and he only is the object of our religious worship.

Yet, though we thus exclude all created beings from our worship, we must not exclude our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Redeemer and Mediator, and as such is crowned with divine honour and glory, and exalted to sit at the right hand of God the Father;—for though, considered in his human nature, Christ is a creature, yet that human nature is now so far exalted above all creatures, that our religious honour and worship is strictly due to him as our supreme Lord.

Religious honour and worship is due to Jesus Christ, both as he is the Son of God in his divine nature, and so is truly God—and as he is our Mediator, sent into the world, and afterwards exalted by the Father. As Son of God, the same worship is due to him as is due to the Father; and such worship is his own, as he is God.—As Mediator, such honour and worship is due to him, as God the Father hath communicated, and appointed to be paid, to him;—for though we must honour only God, yet God may communicate his honour to his Son, and then it becomes our duty to pay it, where God hath appointed it to be paid; and such honour

honour so paid terminates in honouring God, as it is obedience to his appointments. — And this is the case with respect to our worship of Jesus Christ, as appears abundantly from scripture.

We find our thoughts too narrow and too weak fully to comprehend this sublime truth; but we are sure it is declared on divine authority; and therefore we should attentively look at it, though we are not able to see through it; and the humble, grateful Christian, however imperfect his sight, will for a perfect faith, and readiness, in complying with the duty of worshipping his Redeemer, when God, who sent him that Redeemer, commands him so to do.

Our duty of piety then has God and Jesus Christ for its object. Both are included, when we speak of the regard, honour, and worship which are due to God, and which constitute the duty of piety or godliness; — a duty, which as it may be internally felt, and outwardly expressed, so both are requisite; for, as a pious heart ought to shew itself in pious actions — and will do so, otherwise it gives no proof of its reality — so pious actions, if they proceed not from a pious heart, are no better than hypocrisy. — Thus the duty of piety, or godliness,

godliness, is distinguishable into internal and external piety, which are not different kinds of duty, but only different parts of the same duty.

1. External piety, or godliness, shews itself in our use and regard for those ordinances which are appointed for our direction and assistance in the discharge of our Christian duty. A use of these tends to making us good, and a love of them shews that we are so. The ordinances for public worship, prayer, and hearing the word, with the use of the Christian sacraments, are of this sort. They are means, which we want, for keeping us to our duty, as well as expressions of our obedience, which we owe, to God and our Redeemer, who have appointed them. Made as we are with much frailty, and placed as we are among many temptations, we have need of constant and powerful direction and support for holding us steady in the path which Christ hath shewn us — in which he himself hath gone before us, to the happiness of heaven. Our direction and support is powerful, if we will attend to it; — it is no less than the assistance of Christ himself, by his Holy Spirit, which we shall obtain, if we seek it, in the way which he hath prescribed, by the use of his

his ordinances. Such therefore as slight these ordinances, and affect to arrive at goodness and happiness by their own wits, mistake both themselves and Christ; they think themselves angels, when they are but men, and frail ones too; and they think of Christ, not as a teacher, who, besides shewing the rule, assists in working up to it, but as a tyrant, who imposes a task, a hard one, and leaves us to work it as we can. But experience shews, that those who neglect and despise Christ's ordinances, are far from being angels, and that those who apply and regard them are making the best of their way towards them.

I say, apply and regard them — for it is not the bare use of them that produces the good effect belonging to them; this we see too much verified; — but if we religiously apply and regard them, we shall certainly feel a religious good effect arising from them; nor should it disparage or discourage our external piety, that many make it a cloke to cover their wickedness, since it may, and ought to be worn, as a robe of righteousness, when our regard for God's ordinances contains under it, a fear, a hope, a trust, and a love of God. — These are the parts of internal piety, which our external piety, if seriously and sin-

cerely cultivated, will mightily promote, by supplying us with a right knowledge of God, and keeping up our attention to his will, and to the commands and promises which Christ hath given us in his gospel.

2. Internal piety, or godliness, then, shews itself, first in a fear of God.—This is the beginning of wisdom. For, such is our nature, we are more strongly impressed with the fear of evil, than with the desire of good, and the consideration of what we may suffer from offending God, naturally excites our endeavours for pleasing him, and by avoiding sin leads us to the acquisition of righteousness.

God's dominion over us, as he has created and daily preserves us—his infinite presence and knowledge—his irresistible power—his threats against sin, and the examples he hath given us of his executing those threats—and, above all, the future judgment he hath prepared for us—these are considerations which immediately seize the mind, as soon as it sets out to think of God and ourselves; and they are considerations which, as St. Paul says, must needs make us pass the time of our sojourning here in fear. They are considerations, which, did not experience shew the contrary, we should pronounce absolutely

solutely effectual for suppressing all sin and wickedness among us. But the truth is—we do not consider them—they pass in the mind, but so lightly, that they are scarce felt as thoughts, certainly are not weighed as considerations.

Well weighed, they would have good effect;—the pious man weighs them well, and the fear of God, which they suggest, does not affrighten, but instructs, directs, and strengthens him. It is a fear of losing the favour of God, which immediately checks him from complying with any sin which may advance to seduce him, and prompts him with an aversion to what would bring on him the displeasure of God, and spoil the quiet of his conscience. This fear becomes the good man, and keeps him so. This fear the apostle recommends, when he says—“Let us fear, lest we come short of the promise that is given us.” This fear the apostle felt—“Lest, when I have preached to others, myself should be a cast away.”

This fear of God, which is previous to sin, and keeps us from it, is highly commendable and useful, and is so far from making us uneasy, that it leads to ease and satisfaction of mind in submitting to it. But the fear

of God, which we feel in consequence of our having sinned, is another thing. It is then a fear of condemnation, a fear of God's anger and judgment, which our conscience dictates for having offended him. Good men feel no such fear as this. "There is no condemnation," says St. Paul, "to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Rom. viii. 1. And it is to this sort of fear St. John alludes, when he says—"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment: he that feareth is not made perfect in love." 1 John iv. 18.

Yet this sort of fear, which belongeth not to good men, may be of use to those to whom it doth belong, as it may lead them to repentance, and, through that, to an amendment of their lives, and the favour of God. Happy they, on whom it works this effect, as they must be most miserable, who are dismayed at the prospect of God's judgment, yet feel not the spirit of true repentance in their hearts.

And for those, who, in such situation, feel such a spirit of repentance—let them not distrust the merit and success of it, as proceeding from an improper motive; God shews the wicked his judgments, that they may repent and be reclaimed, and it cannot be improper

proper for us to make that a motive to repentance, which God hath appointed should be so. But we must be careful, that our repentance be the true repentance of the heart, and not a mere external compliance with duty, arising from the fear of punishment. Such obedience hath no merit; the fear which produces it is a servile fear, and the obedience itself only shews a base and degenerate mind.

The fear of God, which is acceptable to him, and useful to ourselves, is not a servile but a filial fear of him. For God is not a tyrant, but a father. And our fear of him should be that which springs from the joint consideration of his goodness and his authority; and is strictly consistent and united with our love of him. The good man loves God, as we love a kind parent, whom yet we fear to offend, lest by provoking his anger we lose his favour. This is true filial fear, which is a fear of a liberal and ingenuous kind, and produces alacrity in duty; and though a filial fear looks at the divine threatenings, yet the manner in which it looks at them sufficiently distinguishes it from servile fear — filial fear regards them, but servile fear is afraid of them; the former leads us to goodness and happiness, the latter is the effect of wickedness and a prelude to destruction.

S E R M O N XXV.

R E L I G I O U S H O P E.

I P E T E R i. 13.

*Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and
hope to the end.*

RELIGIOUS hope is a very material part of internal piety.—We are made to live upon hope—and, ready as we are to cherish it in the common affairs of human life, where it often fails us, it were strange, should we neglect it in the business of religion, where we may assuredly depend upon it—that we should govern our conduct by the hope we place in man, and not be guided by that we place in God and our Redeemer.

The objects of our religious hope are, all blessings we may enjoy from God; especially those which are promised in the gospel of Christ—both spiritual and temporal—whe-

ther they concern this present life, or that which is to come; — but then, our hope must be adapted to the nature of the promises, on which it stands; and the blessings, which are promised under the condition of duty, must not be hoped for, but under the performance of that condition.

Our religious hope admits of degrees; and is more or less perfect, according to the cause from whence it proceeds. We have a perfect hope of what God hath expressly promised or declared. Thus we have a perfect hope of a general resurrection from the dead; for this hope proceeds from God's express promise. — There is also a hope, which proceeds, not from God's express promise, but from our own reasonings upon the attributes of God, and the examples we have of them; from whence we derive a hope (in any particular case), that we may obtain of God what we desire; — this sort of hope, though allowable, useful, and comfortable, yet is not so perfect as the former.

Our religious hope, arising thus from the word of God and our own reason, may be considered as previous to Christian duty, or as consequent upon it; in the former case, it operates as an incitement to duty, in the latter,

as the support of it. — Without hope, all duty is impracticable ; but with the hope which Christians have in God and their Redeemer, the duty they owe to both is readily undertaken, and steadily pursued. The promises of the gospel concern both this life and the next ; they set before us blessings and assistance in our duty here, happiness and our reward hereafter ; and when these are set before us under the condition of our duty in seeking them, the hope we feel of attaining them must set us at work ; and, if goodness and happiness be worth our wish, and the promises of God and our Redeemer be worth our credit, we must, with alacrity, “ gird up the loins of our mind, be sober, and hope to the end.”

And, as we advance, we shall feel, that the same hope, which hath set us at work, will keep us to it ; or, to speak more properly, we shall feel, that the hope, which incited us to duty, encreases by experience in it ; when our conscience approves our work, “ and the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are sons of God.”

This hope, arising upon our discharge of duty, as it is the consequence, so is the best security of it, as it establishes in us a love of duty

duty — a very material affection — for what we love best we study most. We should therefore diligently apply our religious hope, and all divine encouragements, for cherishing in us a love of our Christian duty, being assured, that if duty be not maintained in a love of it, it will not stay long in the heart—and the duty that comes not from the heart is worth nothing. This we see and feel in every common duty of life. — This hope too, which establishes in us a love of duty, at the same time fills us with an aversion to sin. For, feeling how delectable the certain expectation of eternal life is to the mind, and that it is the highest good we can enjoy in this life, the desire we have of keeping it up banishes all wickedness from the heart, as being that, which would deprive us of it.

St. Paul, whose expressions are as strong as his faith, calls this hope of salvation a helmet. With great propriety — when we consider, how it operates to our defence and security. A helmet is a defence of the head; from whence proceeds the government and direction of the whole body. And it is this hope of salvation that protects the soul; which, thus protected, directs our whole behaviour, and

and makes all our actions conformable to duty.

“ Every man,” says St. John, “ that hath

“ this hope in him, purifieth himself, even

“ as he is pure,” on whom this hope is placed;

for we cannot place our hope of salvation in

God, “ who is of purer eyes than to behold

“ iniquity,” without removing our iniquity out

of his sight, and setting those virtues in its

stead, which he will look at with approba-

tion; and which the soul securely keeps under

the cover of this hope, which protects it from

the blows of temptation, as a helmet protects

the head from the blows of the enemy.

It is with like propriety that St. Paul also

calls our hope of salvation an anchor of the

soul; which, in our passage through the

duty of this life to the happiness of the next,

is exposed to dangers and difficulties, which

too much resemble the storms, rocks, and

quicksands, that threaten the passage of a

ship at sea; and, as the prudent mariner sails

not without his anchor, so the prudent Chris-

tian has his hope of salvation within him;

at which he rides securely amid the tempta-

tions, trials, and distresses he may meet with

—the bark that hath Christ on board may

be tossed with the waves, but will not be

lost.

Thus

Thus useful, and thus comfortable, is religious hope; — of which however some may take too much, whilst others take too little.

1. Those are too busy with this hope, who hope to be saved, though they are not good and pious, but are wicked and profligate. Such hope hath no foundation; is not supported by any divine promise. The apostle, in my text, says “Gird up your loins, and be “sober — and hope to the end.” He makes alacrity and vigour in setting about a good life, and steadiness in maintaining it, previously necessary for coming at a religious hope, as well as the necessary consequence of having it. Such therefore as are void of what should qualify them for this hope, as well as of what it should produce in them, cannot be supposed to have it; — they may wish to be saved, but the gospel of Christ does not encourage them to hope they shall be saved. — Yet nothing so common as this notion, under which so many want to shelter themselves; and, when they cannot find what they want in the express promise of Christ, flatter themselves they shall meet with it in his love and mercy, and under the effectual work of his redemption. — But, Christ has
already

already amply and sufficiently shewn us his love and mercy — his authority and justice must have their turn for being displayed: and, for the effectual work of his redemption, it is true, Christ died to save sinners, but it was to save repentant sinners; — and what is meant by repentance his gospel plainly sets forth — not merely a sorrow for past sins, but a reformation of life, and the work of future righteousness — which is not the work of a moment.

There are others, who, though they do not make so free with the hope of salvation, as those we have just mentioned, yet may be too forward and hasty, in thinking themselves finally secure of salvation, because their present religious state is such as may entitle them to it — as if they could never fall from their present state, or from the favour of God. This is presumptuous and dangerous.

These, saints as they call themselves, as well as the sinners just mentioned, make no account of the apostle's advice in my text, to be active and busy in the work of a good life, as a necessary concomitant on their hope of salvation; for what occasion for girding up their loins to duty, when they

they cannot fail in performing it? The apostle elsewhere says, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling;" — why "with fear and trembling," if they be finally secure of their salvation? The weakness of man in keeping up to duty is confessed by all, but such saints whose presumption is itself a proof of it; and whoever reads the gospel, and mankind, will see, that Christ has made ample provision for the frequent failings of the best among us, and that mankind exhibits as ample proof how necessary such provision is.

2. As some are too busy with the hope of salvation, others are too indolent or too timid in their use of it.

We should diligently apply it under all the events of life, whether ordinary or extraordinary; and it is from a want of such application, that we fail in our progress of duty, that we are beguiled by the temptations of the world, and sink under its trials. For did we constantly think on what our Christian hope sets before us, we could not prefer the sensual gratifications of this life to the eternal presence and enjoyment of God and our Redeemer; or sink under the trials we may meet with upon earth, with such reward in view as our hope shews us in heaven. But we do not think on these

these things, we do not fasten our attention on them; our hope in them amounts to little more than a belief that they are true, it does not operate in the heart as a principle, a motive to action; hence it is, that the objects of the world, on which we eagerly and constantly fix our attention, draw us aside after them, till our religious hope grows weaker for want of exercise, and at last has more the complexion of religious fear than of religious hope.

The best things, says common observation, by abuse or neglect oftentimes become the worst; and when our religious hope, for want of a due application, degenerates, it may give us as much uneasiness, as a proper application of it will give us comfort — and with reason, when, by neglecting to look at our religious hopes, we are no longer influenced by them, and are betrayed thereby to quit a good life for a wicked one. But so long as our hopes influence and direct our conduct, so long will such conduct animate and support our hopes. If our conscience does not reproach us, we may, we should, have confidence in God, that we shall not fail of his favour, if we do not fail in our duty.

Such therefore do themselves much wrong, who, though they are in a regular course of Christian duty, yet, either from some natural infirmity, or some fantastic notions in religion which they have picked up, deny themselves that comfort, which otherwise would arise from their conduct, and, fancying themselves guilty of sins which do not belong to them, or judging of those they have by a wrong measure, instead of rejoicing in salvation on the hopes which Christ's gospel gives them, are afraid of damnation — for no reason at all.

Presumption on God's favour is wrong; but mistrust in his goodness and promises is more so. Presumption shews our pride, but allows God his goodness, though we make too free with it; mistrust is doubting, if not denying, God's goodness, and derogates from his honour. The Christian's way, in his duty, lies between these rocks of presumption on the one hand and mistrust on the other;—a due sense of our manifold sins will keep us clear of the one — and a due application of what Christ hath appointed for a remedy of them should keep us clear of the other.

It

It were useless to examine whether of these two is worse, when both are bad, and both are to be avoided; as they both carry the marks of his hand who is ever working in our mischief. It is the devil's work to fill the heart with pride and presumption; and, if he cannot withhold us from righteousness, which he most desires, his next favourite aim is to make us uneasy in it; if he cannot make us overvalue our own goodness, he strives to make us undervalue the goodness of God; and, because our religious hope and our duty do mutually support each other, and, together, are the foundation on which stands our future happiness, therefore, if the devil can spoil us of either, he carries his point; if, with our religious hope full about us, he can withhold our duty—or if, in the midst of our duty, he can withhold or mar our religious hope—in both operations he gratifies his own malice and works our mischief.

But, let us “gird up the loins of our mind,” to be attentive and active in duty, and let us “hope to the end.”

Our hope is such, and so well founded on the proposals and promises of Christ,

that, as it is the best encouragement for duty, so nothing should shake it, but our abandoning that duty. We are weak; God knows it, better than we do, and has provided for our weakness; — it is our duty to apply ourselves to the provision he has made, and, having done so, to hope in his goodness, and his mercy through Christ. We should carefully guard ourselves against the two extremes, of suspecting our salvation, when we have not any reason so to do — and of not suspecting it, when we have. Weakness may betray us into the former; but it is wickedness that prompts us with the latter.

In short, and to conclude —

Whenever we indulge religious reflection (and the oftener we do so the better) let us first look into ourselves, and then look up to God and Christ our Redeemer; — if our conscience brings a good report, from an enquiry into ourselves, that we have sincerely endeavoured to discharge the duty God expects from us, and have as sincerely applied ourselves to that remedy for our failure in it, which Christ our Redeemer hath appointed, by a hearty repentance, and faith in his redemption, with an actual amendment

ment of our conduct — we may then look up with hope in God's goodness and mercy through Christ; and be assured, that such hope is as necessary and indispensable a duty as obedience itself, and that it is an essential part, as it is the warmest expression, of our piety to God.

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as obedience itself, and that it is an essential
part of it is the warmest expression of
our love to God.

And we may say, that we have no other
ground for our hope, but the goodness and
mercy of God, and the blood of Christ Jesus
his Son, who has redeemed us from all
iniquity, and purged unto himself a peculiar
people zealous of good works.

Remember, that the love of God is the
basis of our hope, and that it is the love
of God which has sent his Son to die for us,
and that it is the love of God which has
sent his Spirit to dwell in our hearts, and
to witness with our spirits that we are the
children of God, and that we shall inherit
the kingdom of glory.

And we may say, that we have no other
ground for our hope, but the goodness and
mercy of God, and the blood of Christ Jesus
his Son, who has redeemed us from all
iniquity, and purged unto himself a peculiar
people zealous of good works.

S E R M O N XXVI.

T R U S T I N G O D.

P S A L M xxxvii. 3.

*Put thou thy trust in the Lord, and be
doing good.*

RELIGIOUS Trust is another part of internal piety to God, and is so near akin to Religious Hope, that what I have now to offer may well seem to be pursuing the same subject; as in truth it is; for (we feel it in our minds), trust is but a higher degree of hope, as hope is but a lower degree of trust.

A trust in God is that disposition of mind and heart, with which we believe and rely upon him, that he will supply us with what is good for us, especially with what is necessary for our salvation; and that he will deliver us from what is evil, especially what is hurtful to our salvation.

This trust arises from a full conviction of God's power, wisdom, goodness, and truth : and oftentimes our experience of past blessings may well afford us ground, whereon we may place our trust in future ones.

But we ought well to remember, that, besides these considerations, there is another very material one, on which our trust in God must be founded, and that is, a conscience of having discharged our duty to him. — Good men only can place their sure trust in God, because to such only God hath promised his grace and assistance ; which God may give, indeed, to others, but which they only have a right to trust in, to whom it is promised ; and they are the righteous, the godly, those that fear him, and live according to his word. — How many profess their trust in God, who have no right to place it there ! — how many more are there, who talk of a trust in God, yet neither feel it, nor know what it truly is ! — It is the genuine effect of religion, and inseparable from it ; — such, therefore, in vain talk of a trust in God who have no religion. — What they call a trust in God, is but another expression of what they wish may be. They think not of God, and what they wish may
may

may be, they expect not from God, nor set themselves to deserve it of him.

But even where our trust in God arises from, and is attended with, religion, it will be defective, if we do not place it in God alone. — We must esteem all human help as nothing, without divine protection; and should suspect our trust in God, as not being genuine, if we feel it greater or less, in proportion as we see human external means of success to be greater or less; for this is plainly not trust in God but in man — or, it is trusting in God only so far as he pledges his assistance. — God, indeed, in the ordinary course of his providence, confers his help by the use of external visible means — though sometimes he thinks fit to act without them, that we may be thereby taught to depend on God alone. But, however great our external visible means may be, we are to place our trust, not on them, but on the invisible hand of God, who is above them all, and directs them all. Yet such external means of success are too apt, like intervening clouds, to hinder us from looking at God, or from looking properly into ourselves; and therefore, that we may the better know both God and ourselves, God sometimes deprives us of such means; and then

the fears and anxiety we feel convinces us, that what we before thought was trusting in God, was no more than a trust in human means, and leaning on a reed. — Not that we are to reject the proper visible means of our success, and expect God's assistance with our arms folded—but that we should not place our trust in such means; but, having done our duty, should then rely upon God, casting our care upon him, and not despair, even though the visible means of success are withheld.

As we ought to place our trust in God alone, so we ought to place it in him agreeably to the promises he hath given us, and not as we may fondly wish or project. God's promises all relate to our good, either of body or soul, the temporal good of this life, or the spiritual happiness of a future one. These are different objects, and the promises belonging to them are differently set before us. The spiritual happiness of a future state is our true and proper good, and this God promises, on no other condition, as requisite for our obtaining it, than our faith in Christ and obedience to his commands. The temporal good of this life is likewise promised us in the gospel, but not as our true and proper good,
but

but as something additional to it; and the promise of it implies under it a tacit condition, that it shall be granted, if the purposes of God, in his government, and our own salvation, do not require it should be withheld. —

Our trust in God then, upon these promises, must follow the nature of the promises themselves; and we may absolutely expect the spiritual happiness of the next life upon the single condition of our faith and obedience, because God hath set no other condition for our obtaining it; but we may not absolutely expect the temporal good of this life upon that single condition, because other conditions are implied for our obtaining it, namely, that the granting it serves the purpose of God's government and of our own salvation.

But with respect to our spiritual happiness in the next life, we are farther to observe, that, though we may absolutely expect it upon our faith and obedience, yet we are not to think that we thereby merit, or, in a strict sense, deserve that happiness; — but, having performed the condition which God requires of us for salvation, we trust in God we shall obtain what he hath promised to give us upon such performance. The trust we feel in this case stands indeed upon that performance, yet,
not

not as meriting our salvation, but as being required of God for our obtaining it.

With respect to the temporal good of this life, it is reasonable that we should expect it, not absolutely, but as the dispensing it suits God's purposes of government and our own salvation. For, it may be, that the enjoyment of temporal good may weaken our piety, as, on the other hand, the sufferance of evil may strengthen and promote it. God therefore, who in his wisdom knows what is fit for us, and in his goodness is ready to dispense it, gives us not what will prejudice our salvation, however agreeable and desirable it may be to us.—Yet, if we have trust in God, we may be safe and easy in mind, even in the midst of troubles; assured as we are, that God careth for us, and that without his knowledge not a hair of our head shall perish—that he will direct every event for our real good, and, provided it hurts not our salvation, will set us free from the afflictions we suffer; or, if his care for our salvation, or the purposes of his government, admit not that, will supply us with comfort and strength by his Spirit, for sustaining them, and so lead us, as he led our blessed Redeemer, through sufferings to glory.

With respect to the business of life — we are to trust in God for our success in it; — but then we must be good, and our business must be good. He, who sets about a wicked business, cannot have trust in God for his help; for God is no patron or assistant of wickedness: — nor yet does God always assist a good business; for it may be, that a bad man may be engaged in a good business, and God, intending to punish him for his wickedness, may employ an unjust aggressor to defeat him in it, as a scourge for his correction. — When, after the death of Solomon, ten tribes of his kingdom revolted from his son Rehoboam, under the conduct of Jeroboam, Rehoboam's cause was a just one; he had a right to his whole kingdom; but God, intending to punish him, directs Jeroboam, who (exclusive of God's appointment), had no right to any of it, to take away ten tribes from him. (1 Kings xii.) — The king of Babylon's cause, when he came up against Jerusalem, was an unjust one, he had no right to the kingdom of Judah; but God, intending to punish the Jews, for their wickedness and idolatry, delivers them up into the hands of the king of Babylon. — But though such instances may occur in the common events of life, where
God

God favours an unjust cause against a just one, to serve the purposes of his government, yet they give no man a right to hope for God's patronage of unjust purposes. God may employ wicked men as *his* instruments, and so favour their unjust purposes; but wicked men may not employ God for *their* instrument — whose conduct is always just, whatever be the purposes of those whom he employs. — The king of Babylon had no right to the kingdom of Judah, his purpose therefore was unjust; but God, who has a right to dispose of all kingdoms of the earth, to take from, and to give to, whom he pleases, as he had a right to punish the king of Judah and his people, so he had a right to take away his kingdom from him, and give it to the king of Babylon. — God's conduct therefore was just, though the purpose of the king of Babylon was unjust.

But our trust in God for success in the business of life requires, not only that we should be good, and our business good, but also that we make good use of such means as God hath given us for accomplishing it; — not that we should place our trust in them, without thinking upon God, but that we may not neglect God's help, which he offers us through
such

such means, and that, applying them diligently, we may hope for his blessing on our work. — The husbandman, who trusts in God for a harvest, but will neither plow nor sow, must not complain, if he be disappointed. — “They who trust in the Lord,” says the psalmist, “shall eat” — What? — “The labour of their hands” — not what they have not earned.

There are two dispositions of mind which destroy this duty of trust in God; — they are, distrust, on the one hand, and presumption, on the other; the former is a want, the latter is an abuse of our trust in God.

A distrust in God is injurious to his perfections; his power, wisdom, goodness, and truth. This shews itself in cavilling at the dispensations of his providence — as if man could mend the work of God’s government! — but as man, in his highest wisdom, is but weak and wicked, and God, in his severest dispensations, is infinitely wise and good, the government of the world is surely better under God’s management, than it would be with our mending it. Man, had he the government of the world, would not be able to do good, would be always willing to do mischief; God, who is infinitely able and infinitely beneficent,

nescent, never dispenses evil but his operations tend to good.

But though we do not cavil at God's dispensations, we are too apt to be impatient under them. We are too anxious and solicitous about the things of this world;—were we less so, we should be more patient in being disappointed of them, or in being deprived of them; and, under that temper of mind, should be more ready to trust in God, that he orders what is best for us, and that the good he withholds, or takes from us, is not our good, and that we are better without it.—Impatience ruins us,—when it hurries us to be our own providers, or our own deliverers, and will not suffer us to trust the hand of God for leading us up to the good we desire, or for leading us out of the evil which we suffer;—from this impatience, this mistrust in God's providence, arises most of the wickedness that disturbs the world.

In the progress of which we may discover as much presumption on Providence as we see distrust.—We see, that men, after distrusting God's care and goodness in providing for them, will presume upon his patience and goodness in the methods they take of providing for themselves; which are too often such,

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as look more like tempting God, than trusting in him — like trying, not what God will give, but what he will bear; — for the only way of trying what God will give is, to behave so as to deserve his gifts, by submission to his will, and patience under his dispensations; and those, who, by a contrary behaviour, venture to try what God will bear, usually find to their cost what he will not bear, even in this world, and will be severely convinced of it in the next.

To conclude —

Our trust in God is both a duty and a blessing; it is due to the perfections of God, and what our own imperfections absolutely require. We cannot feel our way through the present state of trial without it, much less can we venture to step into a future state of judgment, if not supported by it. We cannot then be too studious for being supplied with it, nor is there a surer way of acquiring it than the rectitude of our behaviour — that is, a sincere faith in what God and Christ have done for our salvation, and a conscientious discharge of that duty, which they, both, expect from us, and which is set before us in the gospel of Christ; — nor is there any connection more necessary, none should be more strong,

strong, than the connection recommended in my text—it should be the first, it should be the last, object of our attention and study—and, as I made it the beginning, so I make it the conclusion of my discourse — “ Trust in the Lord, and be doing good.”

SERMON

S E R M O N XXVII.

LOVE OF GOD.

MATTHEW xxii. 37.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

I HAVE already set before you the internal acts of piety, as they shew themselves in a fear, a hope, and a trust in God; — to finish the description of this duty, give me leave to offer you a few observations upon what is the main support and encouragement of them all — I mean, our love of God.

When we consider God as a being endued with perfect goodness, we must at least allow that he is a fit object of our love; and, if we do not feel that he is really the object of our love, we have reason to suspect there is some-

thing amiss in us, which should be rectified. For what do we think of those, who do not love a good man, but that they are void of goodness themselves?—Whoever is truly good, loves goodness; and, if he loves it in himself, will love it in another; and, if we love goodness in men, imperfect as they are, much more must we love it in God, who is perfect goodness.—Thus the first step in the duty of loving God is to regulate ourselves;—goodness in some degree we must have of our own, before we can love God for his goodness.

But, besides this goodness, or perfect rectitude in God, which makes him a fit object of our love, when we consider him as our benefactor and governor, our love of him is as natural as it is necessary. We naturally love what makes us happy in the lowest degree; and therefore must love what makes us happy in the highest, and is our supreme good; and, God being so, our love of him should be supreme — “with all our heart, “with all our mind, and with all our soul.” The blessings of our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all, God’s inestimable love for us in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, most fully deserve and demand such love

love for him ;—to which if we add the eternal happiness of the next life, which God hath promised us, through Jesus Christ, we must feel the strongest and most natural reasons for our love of him.—And this love of God will as strongly and as naturally prompt us with a sincere desire of being united with him, whom we thus love as our greatest benefactor here, and our supreme happiness hereafter. — Farther ; when we consider God as our governor, our love of him is naturally and reasonably expressed by our obedience to his commands. It is true, our love of God arises not, in this case, merely from the consideration of his being our governor ; because the law, by which he governs us, may be, as we feel it is, disagreeable to our carnal appetites ; but, as God governs us, not only by his law, but also by his promises, which set before us real good, to balance against the false pleasure arising from carnal appetite, this puts us to the choice of the one or the other ; and consequently leads us either to love or hate his commands, and when we choose the former, our love of God as our governor resolves itself into our love of him as being our supreme good ; because we therefore obey his commands ; that we may enjoy his promises.

It may be easier perhaps to be convinced that it is a reasonable duty to love God, than it is to know, whether we do really love him as we ought.—No man will say he does not love God; — but many may be ready to say they love God, who scarcely ever think of him. And others may deceive themselves, and think they love God, when they really do not love him as they ought. This is certain — no one, who persists in a wicked course of life, can be said to love God: — but we may keep clear of wickedness, and yet fall short of this duty.

When we examine ourselves on this matter, we should enquire, what sort of love we entertain for the things of this world. — A love of the world, and a love of God, are opposite affections; and the more we find of the one in our hearts, the less we must expect to find of the other. In making this enquiry, it will be well, if we find, that our love of the world does not carry us over God's express commands to gratify it; but it will be better, if we find, that our attention to what God allows us to enjoy does not make us forget him; and better still, if we can find, that we look with indifference on all that belongs to this world, and with true
desire

desire after God and his happiness. If our love of the world carries us no farther than a prudent use, and moderate enjoyment of it, it is not only consistent with our love of God, but a part of it; for a right use of blessings is the best return of gratitude to him who sends them, and naturally disposes us to fix both our attention and our affection on him; but a contrary behaviour, under the influence of sensuality, vanity, avarice, and ambition, in misusing the world, leads us first to neglect God, then to forget him, and afterwards to dread him; — under which circumstances we shall in vain expect to find a love of him.

Farther — In our search of this duty, to know whether we love God as we ought to love him, we should examine ourselves, whether our good behaviour (for that is presupposed in this enquiry), proceeds from a desire of pleasing God — whether we take delight in it on that account — are anxious to improve it, and feel ourselves unhappy if we do not. — Mere obedience is not sufficient; — that may be performed without any desire of pleasing him who enjoins it — nay, even under a dislike to him — with great punctuality, and yet with great indifference: but we owe God, not only our obedience, but our love;

which is a natural affection implanted in us for our well-being here, and, if we make God the object of it, for our happiness hereafter. This affection operates in seeking what is pleasing to him who is the object of it, and applying it because it is so, is attentive, is anxious in its diligence, and makes us unhappy when we fail, or do not improve in it. — Whoever examines his behaviour towards God by these signatures, will soon feel whether he loves God, or only complies with his commands. — Nor will it signify much on what principle we comply with God's commands, if we do not comply with them upon the true one, and obey God because we love God. — This single reason, when sincerely felt, is a much more solid foundation to build our duty upon, than what some fetch from the pits of moral philosophy, where they take great pains to dig up, what is of no use when they have got it.

To proceed — We may be farther satisfied whether we love God as we ought to love him, if we feel a delight in his company — if we be frequent (with a love of being so), in the use of prayer, and the public opportunities of worshipping him, and hearing his word. — A delight in the company and conversation

verfation of thofe we love, is as natural, as a defire of pleafing them, and a delight in doing fo; and thofe, who truly love God, will always feel delight in fpeaking to him in private prayer, and in hearing him fpeak to them in the public religious affemblies. If then we neglect thefe duties, or feel no delight in performing them—if we fay our prayers in the closet, only to get rid of them—if we had rather go elfewhere than to church, or go there only for fafhion's fake, and feel delight, not in being there, but in coming away, it is plain we do not love God — becaufe we fhun or diflike his company; — a behaviour quite inconfiftent with, and contrary to, love.

As a true love of God will naturally fend us to devotion, fo true devotion fhould arife from a love of God, which we fhould always feel diftinguifhing itfelf, in the performance of our devotion; as its proper principle; — I do not fay we fhould feel no other motive in our devotion; but we fhould feel our love of God as the principle on which we pray. The fetting a good example before others is a motive we ought to feel in our devotion, whether public or domeftic; but we muft not make it the principle on which we pro-

ceed to it; because, though the setting a good example be a duty well to be observed, yet, when we proceed to devotion merely on the motive of setting a good example before others, without feeling a love of God in our own hearts as the principle on which we act, it is so like ostentation, that our devotion perhaps is no better than hypocrisy, and, whatever good it may do others, will hardly be of real advantage to ourselves. — In setting forth our religious conduct we should first take care that all is right within; after which our light that shines before men from a good heart will be bright, lasting, and sweet; but good actions proceeding from a false or empty heart, are a light, which, however bright it may appear for a time, soon goes out, and leaves a stink behind it.

There is another circumstance, by which we may judge whether we love God as we ought to love him, and that is, a zeal for his honour, and a sensible indignation at any profane behaviour towards him; for it is as natural to be angry at any offensive behaviour of others towards those we love, as it is to feel delight in what we ourselves do to please them. To love a friend, and to resent any ill treatment of him, are inseparable feelings; and

and whoever feels a true love and reverence for God in himself, will necessarily be shocked at profaneness in another. When therefore we meet with such instances, and do not feel ourselves hurt by them, we may well suspect the reality, at least the strength, of our love towards God. If on such occasions we are sensible only of an inward complacency in our own goodness, 'it looks more like a love of ourselves than a love of God; and an indifference about what affronts him, is hardly consistent with a true desire of pleasing him. When St. Paul's spirit was stirred within him at seeing the city of Athens given up to idolatry, he felt, what every true lover of God feels at meeting with profaneness. — A good man, I say, will feel this zeal for the honour of God, whom he loves; but discretion, as well as piety, must direct his expression and application of it.

Lastly — The great proof of our having a love of God in our hearts, is our having a love of our neighbour. St. John's plain declaration upon this point supercedes all reasoning about it — "If a man say, I love God, and
" hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that
" loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen,
" how can he love God, whom he hath not
" seen?"

“seen?” (If what is visible before us, and what we are well acquainted with, cannot move our love, how can it be moved by what is invisible and beyond our knowledge?) “And
“this commandment we have from him, that
“he who loveth God, love his brother also.”
1 John iv. 20.

A loving disposition and behaviour towards each other is the best proof we can give that we have the love of God in our heart. Devotion is our duty, is good and seemly; but if men rise up from their prayers to go after the mischief of each other, they had better never have said them. Their sanctity does them no good, if their neighbour be not a gainer by it as well as themselves—if, whilst they elevate their thoughts to God, they do not rectify them towards their neighbour, but set them against him; nor is that heart pure for the acceptance of God, that is *stained*, perhaps *dyled*, with ill-will against men. — So that though it be true, that our love of God is the foundation of duty, yet a love of our neighbour is so closely connected with it, that they must both operate together, nor can a heart rightly disposed set them asunder. — So much are they mistaken, who, in their religious employment, think they have nothing to do but with God; whom too they would confine

confine to the closet, or the church; where if they can but take care of themselves, they take no thought about others, as if they wished to go to heaven without them. But those are worse than mistaken, who, not content with being indifferent about their neighbours, are intent to do them mischief, and yet think they have a love for God, though they cannot but feel, perhaps with pleasure, a hatred for their neighbour, and in so doing, forfeit the character and the reward of good men.

For a conclusion to what I have offered on a love of God, give me leave to observe — That as every virtue has its opposite vice, so the opposite to a love of God is a hatred of him. This indeed, in its literal proper meaning, belongs only to devils — but man may interpretatively be said to hate God, when he rejects or disobeys what God sets before him or commands him to do.

In thus describing a hatred of God, we include three sorts of men. 1. Atheists, who reject all religion which God hath set before us, either by the ordinary law of reason and nature, or by his extraordinary revelations. 2. Deists, as they are called, who pretend to govern themselves by natural religion, but protest against all revelation. 3. Those who, though

though they are not distinguished by a particular technical denomination, are distinguished by a superior degree of guilt; — I mean those, who professedly accept both natural and revealed religion, but govern themselves by neither.

These are, though not literally, yet truly, haters of God; and that they are so is owing to their love of themselves, and their love of the world. They pretend not to want God's directions; or, they are bold enough to defy what opposes their lusts, though it comes with the authority of God to forbid them. Such are incapable of feeling a love of God, and so are destitute of a principle, which is best suited for the support, both of comfort and of duty, in our passage through this life to another —

For another life there certainly is, however some may wish, and, in consequence of that, may argue to the contrary. — And on the persuasion, that there is another life, it will not admit of a moment's deliberation, whether we should love or hate that Almighty Being, to whose love and care we owe the blessings of this life, and on whose will depends our happiness in the next.

S E R M O N XXVIII.

GOD'S ASSISTANCE IN DISCHARGE OF
OUR DUTY.

MATTHEW XXV. 29.

Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away, even that which he hath.

THE parable, to which this text belongs, though it be applicable to God's dispensations in general, is more particularly so to that dispensation of his Holy Spirit, by which we are ordinarily assisted in the discharge of our duty. Of this important benefit it is on strict experience true, that it encreases by use and application; and that, if we neglect the improvement, we lose the possession of it.

This assistance of the Holy Spirit is supplied in a manner not distinguishable from our rational

tional faculty; and we discover its influence not by any immediate sensation, but by its effects, which shew themselves in the improvement of our understanding, and a suitable regulation of our behaviour.

Experience will convince us, that the oftener we comply with those dictates which we feel within us, pointing at our duty, the higher and the more easy is our progress through the paths of virtue. One good action is always a step to another; for the mind feels that satisfaction in the performance of any single duty, as both enables and encourages us to go on in pursuit of still farther pleasure. When we are thus disposed, good actions will quickly multiply around us; for when once we have inclination, we shall soon have opportunity of being good; a compliance with which will insensibly furnish us with a habit of virtue. We shall be daily encreasing our stock of good actions, and find the performance of every duty as easy and pleasurable as it is necessary. — It is thus God gives us his grace, and rewards our application of it with encrease. — But for the truth of this I must appeal, not to those who, continuing in a course of vice, now and then make some faint attempts to return into the paths of virtue; such

such often meet with difficulties as much beyond their strength, as they are contrary to their pleasure; difficulties however these, which do not, properly, belong to virtue, nor is it right to charge virtue with them. — But such as have set out with the early advantages of a religious education, and whose prudence has been duly attentive to the dictates of that grace, which first pointed out the way of life, and still directs them in it — such, I say, will confess the ease and pleasure of their journey; with what readiness they apply that grace which God allows them for their guidance; and with what certain satisfaction they find themselves led from one virtue to another. — On the other hand, there is but too much experience to shew the fatal mischiefs attending those unthrifty servants, who neglect the talent of grace allotted them, and how true it is, that not to apply it, is to lose it. There is no making a stand in a virtuous progress; we must either grow better or worse. So long as there is that opposition within us between the flesh and the Spirit, what strength one loses the other must get; and when once the dictates of the Spirit cease to prevail, the violence of the flesh, finding no weight to retard it, must hurry us back
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with far greater speed than we made in getting forward.

Thus we see too many betrayed, who are blest with talents of grace sufficient, if well applied, to carry them up in higher advances of virtue, but who content themselves with this unthrifty pretension, that, if they continue as they are, they satisfy their duty. Idleness may thus persuade them to hide their talent, but cannot secure it. The devil will no sooner find them at liberty from the work which God hath set them, but he will immediately set them about his own. He is always upon the watch to make a spoil of us, and will think our talent an easy prey, when we have hid it from our own inspection and care. — And how can we complain? — he robs us of what we seem to think not worth having, because we think it not worth using. Thus robbed of our talent of grace, we are his own. We are no longer in the service of our good householder, whose work was life, and his purpose the happiness of his servants; but are enslaved to a tyrant, whose wages is death, and whose purpose is the destruction of those who serve him.

Mark then this short but strong lesson for improving our portion of grace; — We cannot neglect

neglect the improvement without forfeiting the possession of it, nor can we lose the possession of God's talents, without being obliged to traffic with the devil's.

The improvement of the assistance God affords us, therefore, in the operation of our minds, towards a discharge of duty, requires our attention; God expects it of us. But as in all his dispensations to mankind God makes provision for our frailty as well as for our happiness, so he has not enjoined us the use of his grace, without affording suitable means to assist us in it; such is our frailty, and so great is God's care over us, that he trusts us not with the inward dictates of his Spirit, without affording us outward incitements for attending to them in the public ministry of his word, and such ordinary means of instruction as that sets before us.

As God has made our happiness to depend on our own choice, we cannot expect such assistance from him as would make any care and diligence of our own unnecessary. Such assistance would be contrary to the nature of a trial, and opposite to the frequent proposals of scripture, which encourage our obedience, and threaten our disobedience; all which are empty words, if there be no care or diligence expected from us.

God has promised the assistance of his Spirit, and has as expressly appointed outward means of instruction; and as God never promises or appoints any thing in vain, we ought to admit both, and not conclude, that the use of the one destroys the necessity of the other. The fickle promises and purposes of man may be contradictory to each other; but it were a rash charge against the wisdom of God, to set his purposes at variance with each other, or to expect he will favour us with his promises, in opposition to his commands.

It is plain beyond exception, that the inward operation of God's grace on the mind of man, instead of making outward instruction less necessary, makes it more successful. It inclines us to open a willing ear to lessons of virtue and religion, and, because the heart of man is not so careful to retain, as the ear may be to admit, what is useful, the Spirit pursues its work; follows the lesson to the heart; there plants it where it may be most in view, and with a busy care protects it from the passions. Here it cherishes its growth, till, having taken root downwards, and bearing fruit upwards, the mind becomes delighted with it, and sits with pleasure and security in the shadow of it.

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Thus the internal assistance of the Holy Spirit, instead of excluding the external means of instruction, is co-operating with, and consequent upon, a proper application of them; and therefore, as the surest step for obtaining the former is a diligent use of the latter, so it is dangerous to trust to extraordinary assistance without a due application of ordinary means — the use of which is the trial of our obedience, and the improvement, which the Spirit gives us under them, is the immediate reward of it.

This is worthy their consideration, who look upon the attendance on the public ministry of God's word, and such means of instruction as belong to it, to be no more than empty form, if not an idle superstition — and who think themselves secure in a proper discharge of their duty, without the assistance of such means.

If these men are, as they pretend, really desirous of maintaining a good behaviour, they undertake a very arduous performance; a performance, which their own abilities, unassisted, may not carry them through, and yet in which they reject that aid they want, by despising the means through which it must be conveyed. Was there no more in the public

ministry, than an adoration of God's goodness and power, it were ungrateful disobedience in us, who daily experience both, to neglect it; but when it is appointed as a means of conveying a real advantage to us, as well as of paying a suitable acknowledgment to our Creator, there is great folly, as well as ingratitude, in the neglect of it; and this strange presumption is implied in it—that when God, in consideration of our frailty, has appointed certain means for our assistance, we, in confidence of our strength, will undertake to recommend ourselves without it. If God promises us his help, shall we say we do not want it? or, can we reasonably expect to obtain it, if we will not comply with those means, by which he hath commanded us to expect it?

In order to convince such men of the benefits they lose by a neglect of the public ministry, it is the shortest and the strongest method to send them to experience; not because rational arguments upon this topic are scarce or weak, but because men may shut their eyes against reason, when they cannot shut them against fact.

Look round then and see, whether experience does not confirm this observation, that

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the more men neglect the public ministry, the more wicked they are; and what wonder is it, if we omit the practice of our duty, when we refuse the proper opportunities of recollecting it? Or how can we expect to meet with a continual supply of God's assisting grace, when we do not think it worth asking for? It is a common pretence with such, that there is no reason for attending the public ministry of the church, because they can say their prayers at home, and the preacher can tell them no more than what they know already. But he who is regular at his private devotions will not constantly neglect public worship; the oftener he applies the former, the more convinced will he be of his duty in attending the latter; and we may put it to the conscience of such as make this pretence for not attending the public ministry, whether they are not equally remiss in their private devotions.

As to the improvement of knowledge by attending the public ministry, the bare possibility of meeting with it will be a reason with a prudent man for putting himself in the way of it. — But, in truth, we do not go to church to be made wiser, but to be made better; which may more effectually be done by put-

ting us in mind of what we know already, than by acquainting us with what we were ignorant of before. It is not ignorance, but carelessness, that ruins us; nor is it the knowledge of our duty, but the practice of it, which requires so much care and attention from us. The knowledge of our duty is easily had; and few, I believe, want it; but all want improvement in the practice of it; the natural support of which is to be often reminded of our duty, and frequently to ask for that assistance, which we want in the performance of it. And though this may be had in the use of private devotion, yet as public worship, and the use of the public ministry, is another no less effectual means of coming at it, prudence, as well as obedience to God's command, should lead us thither.

That an attendance on the public ministry is really beneficial, let them testify who attend it with that disposition of mind which they ought to have; — such feel advantage from every part and circumstance belonging to the public worship, and find themselves in that composure of thought as gives room for every hint of duty to take place, and to form serious and useful resolutions. An habitual neglect of such opportunities for refreshing the mind

mind with proper recollections of our duty, will be attended with a suitable remission in our duty; and it matters not for men to say, they can behave as well without coming to church as by frequenting it, when, 'tis manifest, they do not.

The invitations of folly will easily prevail, when the messengers of religion are kept at a distance; and when men have been long disused to hear there are vices, they soon persuade themselves there are none. When men have only the fair prospect of pleasure before them, and hear not any representation of the mischievous consequences attending it, what wonder if they rush licentious to the enjoyment of it, and find their mistake only in their destruction? — 'Tis worth while to retreat betimes from the folly of this neglect; for 'tis easier much to improve a religious behaviour than it is to recover it; and the surest method of improving it, is to apply those means which God has appointed for our assistance in it. — His grace is ready to attend, but not to pursue us; and the heaviest condemnation which can fall upon us at the tribunal of our Redeemer is, that we have despised not only his law but his assistance.

I will conclude with the supplication (in our litany) — ‘That it may please God to give to
‘ all his people increase of grace, to hear
‘ meekly his word, and to receive it with
‘ pure affection; and to bring forth the fruits
‘ of the Spirit’ — by cherishing every serious meditation, and following every well-formed resolution. — So may we pass through this life with safety, and in the next be received with this happy applause; — “Well done, thou good and faithful servant! — enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

SERMON

S E R M O N XXIX.

NECESSITY OF A CHRISTIAN-LIKE
BEHAVIOUR.

MATTHEW xxii. 11, 12.

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment? — And he was speechless.

THE parable, from whence the text is taken, represents God's love and care for mankind, in calling them to salvation by the gospel of Christ; by the preaching of which he has opened the kingdom of heaven for our reception, as the king in the parable opened his palace for the reception of his guests.

The king sent forth his servants to invite the guests, and they would not come; he
sent

sent again, and they made light of the invitation, and went another way, after their own business: nay, some abused the servants who brought the invitation; upon which the king was wroth, and sent; and punished them for their contempt of his authority and generosity.

It is thus God invites mankind to salvation by the gospel of Christ; and such will be the consequence of rejecting his invitation; which, though it be tendered in a manner which leaves men to their liberty in accepting it, yet leaves them obnoxious to God's judgment in rejecting it.—Infidels cannot plead, that, being free creatures, they are not God's creatures;—as such, they must expect their happiness from God, and must follow such appointments as God sets forth for their obtaining it.—Nor is it worth heeding what some alledge—that our reason, which God hath given us, is a sufficient guide to happiness, and therefore a bar against expecting any farther guidance;—as if God might not guide us to happiness by as many ways as he thinks fit. It certainly can be no plea for rejecting Christ's gospel, to fancy we do not want it;—we must allow God to be the best

best judge of those wants, which he graciously offers to relieve; and man will fatally counteract his boasted reason, if, to assert his freedom, he rejects salvation when set before him.

The Jews, to whom the gospel was first offered, rejected it; for which, and for their cruel treatment of Christ and his apostles, God punished them with the destruction of their city, and the dispersion of them through the earth; and proceeded to call in the Gentiles, which is represented in the parable by the king's ordering his servants to go out into the highways, and bid all they find to the marriage. — God invites all mankind to salvation; nor is the meanest man or the most wretched sinner forbid to lay hold of the means which he has appointed for obtaining it, though they be called to lay hold of it when and as God thinks fitting.

Next to rejecting God's offers, is the not qualifying ourselves for the benefits they propose; which, truly and in effect, is rejecting them, and will be attended with the same consequence. The man who appeared at the marriage-feast unsuitably dressed was turned

turned out.—Whoever calls himself a Christian should live like one; and whoever expects to sit down in the kingdom of heaven, must be suitably qualified for his reception there by a good life.

That the wedding-garment in the parable has this meaning, will easily be admitted; and that a good life should be a necessary consequence of our accepting the gospel of Christ, and a necessary qualification for our reception in the kingdom of heaven, is as evident, if we consider the true nature and intent of Christ's interposition in favour of mankind;—which is indeed to save sinners—but not to introduce sinners into the kingdom of heaven. They must leave their sins—they must repent and amend—in order to be admitted there.

The sin of mankind, if Christ had not interposed, must for ever have disqualified them for heaven. Christ interposed, and hath redeemed us from sin. But how redeemed us? What so, that, sin as we will, our sins shall not debar us from heaven? No surely;—but that, if we repent of our sins, they shall be forgiven, for the sake of his meritorious death; and our sins, so repented of and forgiven,

given, shall not debar us from heaven. Our repentance then, we see, is plainly the condition, on which we are entitled to the benefit of Christ's redemption.

But what is this repentance, on which so much depends? Is it merely a sorrow for our sins? No surely, but the forsaking them, and the actual amendment of our lives, and the using our best endeavours after righteousness for the future, on the comfortable assurance of being forgiven for the sins that are past. For the true intent of Christ's interposition in our favour was, not merely to redeem us from sin, but to redeem us from sin in order to restore us to righteousness;—without the former, without forgiveness of past sins, our pursuit after righteousness for the future had been impracticable, for want of hope to support and encourage us in it; and useless, as, with all our future righteousness, we had been still obnoxious to divine judgment for past sins unforgiven. But, on the comfortable ground of past sins forgiven, we have encouragement, and may have success, in the work of future righteousness.

As this shews what was Christ's true end and intent in redeeming us from sin, so it shews how much we deceive ourselves, if we
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expect the benefit of his redemption, whilst we keep ourselves short of its true intent; and, by so doing, are not proper objects of it; and this we do, when we either continue in sin without any repentance and amendment, or when we fall back from amendment and renew a wicked course of life. In these cases we are not objects of the redemption which Christ hath wrought, because we come not up to the intent of it, which was to redeem us, that by redeeming he might purify us. For though Christ came to call, not the righteous, but sinners, to repentance—yet he came to introduce, not sinners, but the righteous, into his father's kingdom;—not those who, by continuing in their sins, were neither objects of pardon, nor fit inhabitants of heaven; but those, whose sins being forgiven and forsaken upon their true repentance, and who by their sincere endeavours after righteousness should answer the true intent of his coming, and thereby qualify themselves for those happy mansions which he hath purchased for them.

This then is the wedding-garment recommended in the parable—a life suitable to our Christian profession, and the hopes we derive from it; without which, we disgrace
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the one, and shall certainly miss of the other. — If Christ came, not merely to excuse us for sinning, but to deliver us from it, we certainly counteract his purposes by our continuing in sin; and, however we may be Christians by profession, we are not Christians of God's acceptance — who will acknowledge, not every one who lives under the name of Christ, but those only who sincerely endeavour to live by his precepts; and if Christ hath opened heaven for our reception, and we hope to sit down with him in his kingdom, such hope will forcibly suggest the necessity, not only of repentance, but of purifying and improving our hearts, so as to qualify and prepare us for such advancement; — we must suppress the presumption of sitting down with our Redeemer, either with all our sins upon our heads, or without those virtues which his gospel sets before us. — So disqualified, could we suppose admission into his kingdom, we could suppose no other than such welcome as the man in the parable met with — “Friend, “how camest thou in hither, not having a “wedding-garment? — Bind him hand and “foot, and take him away, and cast him into “outer-darkness.”

No pretensions, but that of our sincere en-
deavours

deavours in the way of a good life, will be allowed to plead our admission into heaven. It is not the zeal — it is not the faith — it is not the outward devotion which a wicked man may set forth — that will procure his salvation. — These are a dress, with which he may figure in this world, but they are not the “wedding-garment,” in which he may be permitted to sit down with Christ in the next.

Zeal for the honour of Christ and his religion is a good thing in a good and discreet man, but not sufficient in a bad man, and may be mischievous under an indiscreet one. Our services to Christ should arise from a proper principle; — even in human judgment services lose their merit, if they arise from a bad principle. But we are often obliged to accept them, because we want them; but Christ, who wants not our services, and who sees our hearts, rejects the service, however eminent, that does not proceed from a good heart, and accepts that which does, however imperfect. — Let no man deceive himself in this important point; there are no acts of zeal for Christ's honour, which will wipe off the dishonour we do him by a wicked life; no zeal for his service,

vice, which will balance the disservice we do him by a bad example. — There is no plea, on which we can proceed to his tribunal, but that, which he himself hath set us — his merits, and our own good life. — Services done in Christ's cause have then their value, when we make ourselves better men by doing them; without this, whatever wonderful works we may have done in his name, when we come to plead salvation upon them, he will answer — “ I profess
“ unto you I never knew you — depart from
“ me, ye who work iniquity.”

Faith in the merits of Christ, without righteousness, will as little avail us for salvation, as zeal for his services without it. The very nature of our redemption — the obvious reason on which Christ interposed to save us, plainly shews, that faith in him, without righteousness, is not the whole of what he expects from us. Christ interposed, that he might make our repentance acceptable with God; consequently, whatever the duty of repentance reasonably implies, *that* Christ reasonably expects from us; whether a good life be not reasonably implied in the duty of repentance, or, whether a wicked life be not utterly inconsistent

with it — judge ye. — In short, the notion, that faith in Christ, without righteousness, will save us, is a notion, which no man of common sense will admit, which no man of common sobriety will either want or wish for, and which no man of common modesty will teach; — and such teachers should be heard with great caution, who extol faith to the disparagement of righteousness, and who set forth such notions in religion as seem to be drawn more from their own pride than from the humility of Christ's gospel; and which can never be established, whilst this express determination of our Saviour stands in scripture — “Not every one that
“ faith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into
“ the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth
“ the will of my father which is in
“ heaven.”

Which determination of our Saviour destroys another pretension, which some are weak enough to trust to, who think their external acts of devotion shall be their plea for salvation; — mistaking that for goodness, which is but the means that leads to it. True devotion springs from the heart, and the Spirit of God returns its good effects to strengthen it. It is, at once, the result and the support
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of a good life; but lip-service is hypocrisy; an affront to God, and of no benefit to ourselves; which, if it serves not to make us righteous here, will hardly be effectual in making us happy hereafter.

If this be the case even where the forms of devotion are scriptural, chaste, and leading to righteousness, what shall we say, where they are unscriptural, idolatrous, and tend to lead men *from* righteousness? — Such are the devotions of the church of Rome, which are so far from tending to make men good, that they seem calculated for keeping them wicked; and, because wicked men have most reason to be anxious about their salvation, the church of Rome (kindly shall I say, or profanely?) supplies them with matters in abundance to place their trust upon.

We have great reason to thank God for our deliverance from such fooleries; and we shall do well to keep ourselves out of them. — The way to it is to lead a good life, with a steady faith in the promises of Christ, as they are set before us in his gospel. This if we do, we shall want no assistance, either from popery or fanaticism; no artifices to quiet a noisy conscience, and cover, but not

cure, a diseased heart; but in proportion as we abate in our care for living a good life, we shall be more inclined to such remedies (from whatever quarter they come) as will serve to make a bad one fit easy upon us, by resolving the whole of our duty into faith, and making that faith reach to every thing that is proposed to us as a hold for salvation.

To conclude. — Our sincere endeavours to lead a good life is our best security against all delusion; and the only title (of our own) to the kingdom of heaven. — *What* Christ came to promote in us, *that* he will expect from us. He came to promote righteousness in us. Righteousness then is the mark, by which we should distinguish ourselves here as Christ's followers, and by which we shall be admitted hereafter as Christ's brethren in the kingdom of heaven.

This is the wedding-garment — the robe of righteousness — which though we cannot expect to wear, absolutely without spot or wrinkle, through this dirty pilgrimage of life, yet we must endeavour to wear it as clean as we can; — who wears it most will wear it best — the most careful will have stains upon it — and shall find mercy. But, who goes without it, is undone.

SERMON

S E R M O N XXX.

NECESSITY AND EFFICACY OF CONSTANT
PRAYER.

 LUKE xi. 8.

I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

CHRIST's disciples had been requesting him, that he would teach them to pray, as John taught his disciples. Accordingly he gave them that form of prayer which is in use with us, and is called the Lord's Prayer. — But as having a form of prayer would do them no good, unless they made use of it, Christ immediately gives them a familiar parable, in which he recommends the frequent use of prayer.

“ Which of you shall have a friend, and

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“ shall

“ shall go unto him at midnight, and say
“ unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;

“ For a friend of mine in his journey is
“ come to me, and I have nothing to set
“ before him?

“ And he from within shall answer and
“ say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut,
“ and my children are with me in bed; I
“ cannot rise and give thee.

“ I say unto you, Though he will not rise
“ and give him because he is his friend, yet
“ because of his importunity he will rise and
“ give him as many as he needeth.

“ And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall
“ be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock,
“ and it shall be opened unto you.

“ For every one that asketh receiveth; and
“ he that seeketh findeth; and to him that
“ knocketh it shall be opened.”

The force of the parable lies in this circumstance — “ though he will not give him
“ because he is his friend, yet, because of his
“ importunity, he will rise and give him.” —
This shews at once both the necessity and the
efficacy of prayer. The man who wanted
three loaves, came to the other with the
strong pleas of neighbourhood and friendship;
which pleas, however, are set aside, as inef-
fectual

fectual for getting what he wanted, and his success is wholly attributed to his importunity in his request. This is intended to shew us, that our own merit, any good qualities we may possess, however great, will not entitle us to expect what we want from God without prayer, but that with importunate prayer we shall be successful.

The duty of prayer then seems to stand on this necessity—that we cannot expect what we want from God without it. If it be farther asked, On what this necessity stands? or, what is the reason why we must not expect what we want from God without prayer? — the answer is ready — Because God hath so ordained it.

Some will tell us, that the wisdom of God sees our wants — that his power is able, and his goodness ready, to supply us with what is proper for us. This is very true. But if, besides this, it be as true, that God has expressly commanded us to pray to him for what we want, no one who believes the command can say, that the duty which is built upon it is unnecessary. Now God has expressly commanded us to pray to him, in the gospel of Christ. If then the gospel of Christ be true, the command for praying to God is of divine

authority, and, consequently, the duty is necessary; and no one can deny the necessity of prayer, without despising Christ's gospel.

This may signify little with those who value themselves upon that character. Such will say — Yes, prayer is a necessary duty upon the foot of Christianity — not meaning, however, that they admit the gospel, and, on the authority of that, admit the duty of prayer; but their meaning is, that they regard not the gospel, and make light of such duties as depend on that authority for their foundation.

We will leave such men to themselves; — reasonable men will think otherwise; and, being persuaded of the divine authority of the gospel by such arguments as have never yet been disproved, will admit the duty of prayer on that foundation, and will think it reason sufficient for complying with it, that Christ hath commanded it.

But prayer was in use before the gospel of Christ enjoined it; and the general use of it among mankind in all ages shews, that it must be derived from some general principle. Whether men's own natural sense suggested it to them, or whether it was derived from the early revelations which God made to the patriarchs, is not material to enquire, as we have

have now before us a fresh institution of it in the gospel of Christ, on which we may securely place it. The advantage of which institution, in establishing the duty of prayer, is evident, since, however some may dispute the necessity of it, considered only as a dictate of natural reason, no one can dispute it when it is shewn to be the command of God. And, considering how men had perverted this duty by idolatry, it was necessary, after setting the duty on the plainest authority, to give them the plainest direction in the use of it.

The duty of prayer then stands on this principle — that God hath commanded it; — this shews the necessity of it. If it be farther asked, Why God hath commanded it? the answer will shew the use of this duty.

God hath enjoined us the duty of prayer, as a suitable means for making ourselves good, and, consequently, for making ourselves fit objects of his favour, and the happiness belonging to it. — If prayer hath this effect, we must admire God's goodness, as well as submit to his authority, in the appointment of it; and must be sensible, how much we hurt ourselves, as well as dishonour him, by our neglect of it.

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I. The use of prayer is a suitable means for making us good, as it is a suitable means for keeping up our religious faith—that is, for preserving in our minds a sense of God and his government over us, which is the true foundation and support of our good behaviour.

Men may talk of morality, as distinct from a sense of God and his authority; but they will hardly practise the one without feeling the other. For though our actions may be called good, as they agree with the mere moral rule of duty, without considering God's will and authority in the matter, yet men will hardly be kept in the practice of such good actions; but through such consideration, God's will and authority is a much more persuasive call to duty, than our own rational conviction; especially as it carries with it the sanction of reward and punishment—a circumstance, which however the speculative philosopher may dislike, as derogatory of true virtue, the practical philosopher will admit, as absolutely necessary for securing the obedience of so corrupt and perverse a creature as man. This sense of God, and his government over us, is necessary; this is religion; and the setting

ting our good behaviour on this principle is setting it on the true one; — and this principle is best promoted by the use of prayer.

Prayer is at once the result of religion, and at the same time promotes it. It is the result of religion; for we must first have a sense of God and his authority before we can pray to him. Yet, such is the mutual dependence between religion and prayer, that the former, though it be the foundation of the latter, yet itself receives improvement from it; for though we cannot pray to God without first having a sense of him and his authority, yet the more we pray to him the better we preserve and promote such sense.

Prayer necessarily reminds us of God's infinite perfections; and, as it proceeds upon a faith and trust in them (without which it is an absurd thing) so it serves to confirm and strengthen such faith.

Whilst we are offering up our own petitions to God, millions are doing the same. Yet are we persuaded of his attention to us; nor are we the least apprehensive, that so many petitioners, at the same instant, should at all distract his care. This necessarily reminds us of the infinite presence of God; that he is every where; and that he is at all times able
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to hear the petitions of all who apply to him. And, as we proceed to prayer on this persuasion of God's omnipresence, so, the oftener we pray, the more we are confirmed in such persuasion.

But we are not only persuaded that God is able to hear us when we pray, but that he is also able to give us what we ask. Yet, when we reflect (and we cannot help reflecting) on the number, the variety of wants which are thus incessantly represented before God from the whole race of men, and, at the same time, are persuaded, that he is able to give to every one that asketh, how necessarily must we think of God, as a being endued with infinite power! since less than infinite power cannot be equal to such a work. And as we fall on our knees with this notion of God's omnipotence, so we rise with a fresh impression of it on our minds.

The like may be said as to God's wisdom and goodness. As we cannot pray to him but with a persuasion that he knows what is fitting for us, and is disposed to give it us, so, whenever we do pray to him, we must feel on our minds a fresh impression of the infinity of that wisdom, which can thus distinguish what is fitting for all, and for each of his creatures,

tures, as well as of that goodness, which perpetually waits on his wisdom, to communicate the great number and variety of blessings which that directs.

Lastly; the notions of God's justice and mercy, so necessary for the support and encouragement of man's obedience, as they send us to prayer, so they are strengthened and improved by it. These are perfections in God, which man is most concerned to believe; — liable as he is to the outward mischiefs of the world, his faith in God's justice is a necessary foundation, whereon he builds that hope, on which he must stand to acquit himself with constancy in the part of life allotted him: and prone as he is to the inward depravity of his own heart, which is perpetually drawing him into sin, his faith in God's mercy is as necessary a foundation whereon he builds that hope, on which he must proceed to a future better behaviour. — It is useful then to be constantly reminded of what we ought never to forget; and which we cannot forget, but at the hazard of our duty here and of our happiness hereafter: and the duty of prayer, as it is useful in reminding us of other divine perfections, on which we must build our religion, is particularly so in setting God's justice

justice and mercy before us — which is not only the foundation of our religion, but is the very life and soul of that obedience which should follow from it.

But here it should be well observed — that the display of God's justice and mercy is owing to the revelation of his son Jesus Christ. The sacrifice and mediation of Christ are the fullest demonstration of both; and as these have more fully opened to us the justice and mercy of God, so it is through these we must apply ourselves to them. It is the love of Christ which leads us to the mercy of God; and they are his merits, which enable us to meet the justice of God. Without his gracious interposition, we had found no place for pardon and amendment after sin: we could only have trembled before God's justice, and could have found no assurance from his mercy. But Christ, by his sacrifice and mediation, hath restored us not only to a fresh, but a comfortable faith in these perfections of God; through his means they are become a solid foundation of our hope, a lively encouragement of our obedience, and a constant object and support of our prayers.

Accordingly Christ hath commanded us to pray — and, as was both suitable and useful;
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hath commanded us to stamp our prayers with his name and authority. This then shews a farther advantage in the use of prayer towards maintaining our religious faith—that, whilst it inculcates our faith in God's justice and mercy, it cannot fail inculcating, at the same time, our faith in the love and mediation of Christ, through which we have access to God's justice and mercy, and in whose name we apply for them.

Thus far then the duty of prayer appears to be a suitable means for making us good, as it is a natural means of preserving our religious faith—of preserving in our minds a sense of God and his government over us, as well as a sense of Christ and his mediation in behalf of us.

have commanded us to keep our prayers with
his name and authority. This then shows
further advantage in the use of prayer towards
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it strengthens our faith in God's justice and
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Christ through which we have access to God's
justice and mercy, and in whose name we
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be a suitable means for making us good, as it
is a great means of preserving our religious
faith - of preserving in our minds a sense of
God and his government over us, as well as a
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of us. We are to remember that the
prayer of the saints is a powerful means of
obtaining the mercy of God for ourselves and
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mercy of God for ourselves and for others.

S E R M O N XXXI.

The same Subject continued.

LUKE xi. 8.

I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

IN my last discourse I observed, that Christ here makes use of a familiar parable to shew the necessity and the efficacy of prayer.

The man who wanted three loaves came to the other with the strong pleas of neighbourhood and friendship, which pleas however are set aside as ineffectual for getting what he wanted, and his success is wholly attributed to the importunity of his request. This is intended to shew us, that our own merit will not alone entitle us to expect what

we want from God, without prayer, but that, with prayer, we shall be successful.

Yet some will say — What need of prayer? the wisdom of God sees our wants, his power is always able, and his goodness always ready, to supply them. True; — but if it be as true, that God hath commanded us to pray to him for what we want, no one who believes the command can say, that the duty which is built upon it is unnecessary. Now the gospel of Christ hath expressly enjoined the duty of prayer — as a suitable means for making ourselves good, and consequently for making ourselves fit objects of God's favour. If prayer hath this effect, we must admire God's mercy and kindness as well as submit to his authority in the appointment of it, and must be sensible how much we hurt ourselves as well as dishonour him by our neglect of it.

The use of prayer, I observed, is a suitable means for making us good, as it is a natural means of preserving our religious faith — of preserving in our minds a sense of God and his government over us, as well as a sense of Christ and his mediation in behalf of us. — As prayer proceeds upon a faith in these points, so it serves to confirm and strengthen such faith.

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But as faith is not the whole of our duty, so neither is this the whole efficacy of prayer, that it serves to confirm and strengthen our religious faith. We must live according to what we believe; and prayer is as effectual in leading us to a right practice as it is in keeping us to a right faith.

Prayer naturally leads us to repentance and resolutions of a good life. Indeed this is previously necessary to qualify us for prayer, yet does it receive great improvement from it. For when we bring our prayers before God, for his protection and blessings, we do not surely mean to affront him, by expecting his favour whilst we are objects of his displeasure. Nor can we mean to mock him by a formal use of words without any sincere meaning in them. Whoever does this does not pray; and, instead of meeting with the success attending the use of prayer, is in danger of meeting the mischiefs which arise from an abuse of it. If we put ourselves upon asking God's favour, common sense, as well as religion, will direct us to put ourselves in that condition on which God hath promised to grant it, and that is repentance and a resolution of amendment; whoever does this, not only prays with propriety, and consequently

with success, but is got so far in the work of a good life, that he hath begun it; and the more frequently he puts himself in this condition, the more likely is he to get on and improve in it.

Nor is it any objection against this efficacy of prayer, that we are too often returning to our former courses. Our failures in keeping up to our good resolutions, it is true, are frequent, and, because they are so, God has graciously appointed the duty of prayer to be frequently applied, as a remedy for setting us right again and strengthening us in our obedience. God's appointing this, who hath appointed nothing in vain, is a proof that the duty of prayer is effectual in leading us to a good life, if we will but persist in the application of it. It is not intended to make us saints at once, by a single application of it; nor will it make us good men but by a constant use it. The recovery of our bodily health is not wrought immediately by a medicine, which nevertheless is effectual for procuring it. Relapses will intervene amidst frequent applications of it, yet it will take place and succeed at last. The recovery of our soul's health is no more instantaneous than the recovery of our bodily health, and what

what is really an effectual method for procuring it may require time, may admit of interruption, and yet, if persisted in, will work its way at last to the desired effect. Frequent recollections, and frequent resolutions, though they arise from our weakness, yet in time will be the cause of strength in us. For as it is a want of religious thought which keeps men wicked, so the application of it must tend to make them good; and the oftener men pray, if they pray as they should do, the more they will think religiously, and the more they think religiously, the more inclined they will feel themselves to act as they think.

But the principal effect of prayer towards making us good is, that the more we pray the more we qualify ourselves for God's assistance in enabling us to do as we resolve. We are weak, but God is strong; and though of ourselves we are able to do nothing, yet, through his assistance in strengthening us, we are able to do all things that are required of us. God hath promised to give the assistance of his grace to those who ask and seek it, and let us not presumptuously enquire why he will not give it but to such. God is master of his own gifts; and, so long as he is ready

to bestow them upon the very easy terms of asking for them, we have none to blame but ourselves, if we go without them.

Such therefore as sincerely desire to lead a good life, will want no other reason for prayer than this — that it is the means appointed by God himself for procuring them his own assistance towards obtaining what they desire. Nor will they be discouraged in the use of these means from their not finding an immediate success, but (as they have Christ's express leave, nay command, for it), will be importunate in their use of it; and as surely as they are importunate, so surely shall they be successful.

The force of the parable, as I have already observed, lies in the importunity with which the request is made, which is set forth as the reason of its success. God indeed wants not our importunity, any more than he wants our prayers; but if, for our own benefit, we ought to pray to God, we should do it with sincerity, otherwise we make a mock of him; and, as our sincerity is naturally expressed by our importunity, God sets himself forth as expecting it; not that our importunity operates for moving God to grant us what we pray for, but because our importunity shews
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our sincerity, and our sincerity qualifies us for God's acceptance.

As God makes use of human language, so he makes use of human sentiments, that we may the better understand him; now what more common human sentiment than this, that faint asking invites denial? God therefore, when he bids us be importunate with him, only reminds us of what is so ready in our petitions with each other—in our conduct of which we may observe that modest suitors seldom speed, at least, importunate suitors seldom fail.

As to those who have no desire of leading a good life, I know not what such have to do with prayer. They cannot, without great mockery of God, apply themselves for his assistance in growing good, whilst they feel no inclination to be so, but are still resolved to make themselves more and more wicked. Nor can they, without as great presumption, apply themselves for other blessings at God's hand, so void as they are of the qualifications which should deserve them, and so obnoxious as they are to his displeasure. — When I say that such have no business with prayer, I must not be understood to mean, that such are discharged from the duty of it, but that they

have disqualified themselves for the performance of it; and let them look well at the consequence of that; their account hereafter will be the heavier for having wilfully disabled themselves for so material and necessary a duty; and their condition here in the mean time will be the worse, as, by the neglect of prayer, they are disqualified for those spiritual blessings which are annexed to it, and which are absolutely necessary for conducting us through duty here to happiness hereafter.

As to what we call the temporal blessings of life, it is true they are not so closely annexed to the duty of prayer, that they who perform it never miss of them, and they who neglect it always go without them. We see the contrary in every day's experience—though perhaps we think we see more in this matter than we either do or are able to see. But, however, we see many, for instance, who are surrounded with blessings from the hand of Providence, and who nevertheless are utter strangers, if not enemies, to the duty of prayer; whilst others, who pay a serious and constant regard to it, fare very indifferently. But such appearances will have no weight with a good man, in discouraging him from the duty of
prayer

prayer — because he will easily observe, that God hath not appointed the duty of prayer as a rule of government, for his own direction, but as a remembrance of it, for our use. God commands us to pray to him for what we want, because otherwise we should be apt to forget his authority over us, and consequently to forget our dependency upon him, and the duty arising from it. But though God bids us pray to him for what we want, yet this still leaves him at liberty to give us only what he sees fit for us — and does not withhold him from bestowing his gifts elsewhere, according as the uses of his government may call for them, though those to whom they are sent do not ask for them.

The truth is, the performance of the duty of prayer gives us a title to God's favour — this is annexed to the duty; but it does not give us a title to this or that temporal blessing — this is not annexed to the duty, but belongs to the all-wise but unsearchable rule of God's government over mankind.

Yet such as perform this duty are sure to be no losers — they are sure to have what is fit for them, and, being entitled to God's favour, are sure of being the better for it, if not here yet hereafter. — As for such as neglect or despise

spite this duty, they may be sharers (greatly so), of God's bounties; but, having no title to his favours, they scarcely enjoy them as his blessings. We daily see such bounties fitting not like blessings about those who have them. We can see something of this — but God, who sees the heart, sees more — and those who have them feel more. Such men are no gainers by God's bounties, though they are employed by them: they are but instruments in the hand of Providence, which God uses for the purposes of his government; and when he lays them aside they will have the more to account for, and it will be well if they have not more to suffer.

But however God may think fit to dispose of his temporal blessings according to his own unfathomable purposes and rules of government, this is certain, that he will dispose of his spiritual blessings according to the open and express word of his promise. However he may suffer those who pray to him to want his bounties in their basket, he will never suffer them to want his bounties in their heart. He will assuredly furnish them with that grace, which will enable them to find ease and contentment in a moderate allotment, and patience even in a hard one. To recom-

pense his denial of this world's riches, he will reward their prayers with the inestimable riches of a quiet conscience, to attend them through a good life here into a happy one hereafter. These are blessings far superior to what we call the temporal blessings of life, and are not only independent of them, but are better secured to us under a moderate than a full enjoyment of them. These are blessings which, if we truly seek them, the goodness of God will not suffer us to want, however his wisdom may not permit us to abound in others, which, though we seek them, may not be fit for us. These the poorest among us may have for their prayers; whilst such as neglect this duty will surely want them, however God may suffer them otherwise to abound. — Poor abundance! — in a right use of which men hardly reach even imaginary happiness, and by an abuse of which they will certainly fall short of true happiness hereafter.

To conclude — with a retrospect to the parable to which my text belongs — we should have that religious importunity in our prayers, as not to let our suits drop, because they are not presently granted. — We may often see, in holy scripture, God outwardly discouraging, when he is intentionally kind and beneficent —
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like Joseph's behaviour to his brethren, who spake roughly to them, at the same time that his bowels melted towards them.

If our prayers succeed not immediately, yet they are not lost, and God may defer, though he does not reject, the prayers of his favourite children. Even David, "the man after God's own heart," expostulates with God, "How long, O God, wilt thou forget me?" — and in St. John's Revelations, the souls of martyrs are represented under the like expostulation — "How long, O God, dost thou not avenge our blood?" — To which expostulation they received for answer, "Have patience yet a while;" and with this answer "they had given them a long white garment."

If God even refuses what we *ask* for, he will give us something else — if not the good of this life, yet what is better than the very best of it — he will give us patience and contentment.

Let us then take this encouragement along with us, for applying ourselves to the duty of prayer — that we thereby entitle ourselves to God's favour, who knows better how to provide for us, than we know how to choose for ourselves, and therefore we may be sure of
success

success though we may fail of our wish ; —
and let no condition in life, however grievous,
discourage us from the use of prayer, or tempt
us to charge God foolishly in appointing it —
remembering always, that the design of it is
not to make us rich, but to make us good.

not to make us rich, but to make us good. Remembering always, that the design of it is us to change God's liability in appointing it—this brings us into the aid of prayer, or rather and let no condition in life, however grievous, stand though we may not of our will;—

S E R M O N XXXII.

HUMILITY.

ROMANS xiii. 8.

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another.

THE church hath judiciously directed our thoughts to the duty of humility, as a suitable preparation for celebrating the approaching nativity of Christ; which is itself the most wonderful example of humility, and which requires humility in us, as the most necessary qualification for enjoying the great blessing Christ brought with him at his coming among us.

Man fell by pride — it is therefore naturally proper he should recover his fall by humility. The scripture shews us, that the transgression of our first parents arose from their aspiring

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to more knowledge than God had given them, and to a higher state than that in which God had thought fit to place them; and the world shews us, that we inherit our progenitors folly — that pride and discontent are still the ruling passions of mankind; which, as they at first lost us heaven, do still continue to disturb our abode on earth.

For hence spring envy, avarice, and ambition — the fatal enemies of justice and benevolence, which are the bonds of union among us; — hence abound the vices men run into for gratifying their lusts, at the expence of the peace and order of society.

These are not suitable dispositions for meeting the Saviour of the world — for celebrating his first advent with propriety, or for meeting his second without fear. Christ first came to deliver us from sin; and will come again to examine, how we have maintained our deliverance from it. — These dispositions then must be laid aside; and, as every effect is best removed by a removal of the cause, that pride and corruption, which produces them, must be rectified, and we must prepare ourselves for meeting our Redeemer, with that humility and purity which he came to teach, and which he expects from us.

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This is the duty of the present season — which will be best discharged by a serious examination of our conduct; how we are performing, according to our several stations and capacities, those duties which we owe to others and ourselves.—Such a survey, if strictly made, is enough to make us humble;—for however the good man may derive comfort from it, he will hardly find reason for pride; but will feel this reflection mixed with his comfort, that, good as he is, he might be better;—and, that he is not so bad as he might be, is more owing to God's grace, than his own strength. The wicked man, from such survey, will surely feel reason for humility; which, if he encourages it, will be his comfort too, as it is his appointed way to pardon, and his natural way to purity.

In this survey of ourselves let us take the apostle for our guide, who, in the epistle for the day*, carries us through a summary of our duty, where we may soon see our defects, and hear his advice for the amendment of them.

The great duty, with respect to others, which the apostle here points to, is that comprehensive one of loving one another.

* First Sunday in Advent.

This duty flourishes only under the mild influence of humility, but is blasted with the venomous breath of pride; — for an unreasonable value of ourselves necessarily excludes a reasonable regard for others. The duties of justice and benevolence (both which respect the good of others), are only to be practised under a moderation in the pursuit of our own good; as every act of injustice and unkindness may easily be traced back to some principle of immoderate love of ourselves, which is pride — and an immoderate desire of gratifying it, which is lust. Every man, upon reflection into his own conduct, will discover where he is defective in these duties, which should set him at work for a better discharge of them; — or he will feel satisfaction from his observance of them, which will give him encouragement for improving in them.

Under such reflections it will occur to us, that though these two duties of justice and benevolence are both of equal obligation, yet the latter is much more extensive than the former. We are apt, indeed, to behave, as if we thought our obligation to justice was stronger than our obligation to benevolence, as if, for instance, we were more obliged to
discharge

discharge a debt, than to do a voluntary good ; and it is true, that, upon a competition between the two duties, justice should take place of benevolence, yet not because justice is of greater obligation, but because, in the natural order of things, it is first to be performed — a man should pay his debts, before he bestows his gifts, otherwise he runs into injustice, by giving to one what belongs to another ; but though, in the order of things, justice should have the precedence of benevolence, yet, in the nature of the duties themselves, they are of equal worth, and of equal obligation ; are both founded on a love for others, and both directed to promote the good of others ; which all are obliged to promote for all, and which those only neglect, who are actuated by an immoderate love of themselves, which prompts them to be unjust or unkind to others.

Yet, though these duties of justice and benevolence be of equal obligation, they are not of equal extent ; the latter being much more extensive than the former. Justice may be so discharged, that nothing more remains to be done ; but benevolence is never so discharged ; a man may be out of debt, at times, for what justice demands, but never for what benevo-

lence requires of him. "Owe no man any thing," says the apostle, "but to love one another" — implying, that the debt of mutual benevolence can never be wholly discharged, though all other debts may; — which must needs be the case, when we consider, that debts of justice are limited to particular stations, and to particular acts in those stations, but the debt of mutual benevolence is not limited to particular stations, but reaches to all the wants of all mankind, as they come within our notice and abilities.

This benevolence, which, in its operations, fills all mankind, is that love, which the apostle says, "fulfils the law." For the whole law, which God hath given us, is comprehended in the love of God and of our neighbour. Now, as our love of God is best expressed by obeying his commands, it follows, that in loving our neighbour, which is a duty God hath commanded us, we discharge our love to God, and to our neighbour also. — This is "fulfilling the law." — Besides, as the whole duty of loving our neighbour is comprehended in the particular duties of justice and benevolence, a due discharge of the latter is a full discharge of both; because a due
discharge

discharge of benevolence necessarily secures a discharge of justice also; for if we love others so, as to be ready to do them all the good we can, we shall never do them hurt by any particular acts of injustice — the disposition that leads us to work good cannot lead us to work evil to mankind.

In the conduct of life there is room for every man's reflection, if not to enquire how far he has been injurious to others, at least to enquire how far he advances in the opposite virtue of doing them good. Such enquiry is the more necessary, because we are too apt to content ourselves with the negative virtue of not hurting our neighbours, without employing our endeavours in the positive virtue of serving them. For, however well turned the general temper may be towards the duty of doing good, and however enabled we may be for doing that good which our station in life sets before us, yet, considering our natural indolence and inattention — considering the accidental disabilities arising from the temporary interpositions of pleasure, not to mention the necessary demands of unnecessary luxury — considering the whimsical impediments of caprice, and the suggestions of avarice, which men are ever mistaking for

prudence — I say, considering these natural infirmities, which in some degree cleave to the soundest minds, and obstruct benevolence, there are few, I suppose, who, in a serious retrospect into their account of what good they *have* done, and what they *might have* done, will not feel more reason for humility than pride in the survey. — The benevolent man, indeed, always feels pleasure from reflecting on his conduct; but the more benevolent the heart is, the more delicate it is; and the better pleased any one is with the opportunities he has employed of doing good, the more will he be touched with those he has omitted; — we see at once where such sensation will lead those who feel it — namely, into a modest opinion of their benevolence, and a true desire of improving it.

It is true, our abilities may fall short of our disposition in doing good, and wherever that is the case, the disposition alone will have its full merit with God; who sees the heart; and where his own dispensations have shortened the hand, will not expect to reap where he has not sown. — God does not demand duty beyond power; nor one duty at the expence of another; so that, however unre-

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strained our disposition be, the practice of it must needs be confined within limits. God himself hath confined it, where he hath not given the ability of practising it; as, on the other hand, he hath directed it, where he hath set before us the proper objects on which he would have us employ it. The neglect of which, in pursuit of other objects, however specious in the judgment of the world, is disobedience to God's appointments; and however welcome our beneficence may be to those who enjoy it, it loses the favour of virtue, and becomes iniquity and injustice to those who have missed it, and who had a better right to it.

Yet, on the other hand, as we cannot see each other's hearts, and as every man must be allowed to judge for himself, what are his abilities, and where they shall be directed, this plea of disposition, but want of ability, may be much abused; — and we cannot help it. — But still, considering the great variety of conditions and wants among mankind, and the no less variety of abilities dispensed among us, by which we may serve each other, it cannot be supposed, that any man, scarce the meanest and most wretched, is placed absolutely out of all capacity of doing

good, however difficult it may be for others to judge, what good he ought to do; — and we should take special care, that the difficulty others have in judging us on this point, does not betray us into a partiality in judging ourselves — because, however incompetent the judgment of the world may be, still it is a judgment we *cannot* avoid, and there is, besides, a higher and unerring judgment in heaven, by which we *must* abide.

An enquiry into this part of our duty may doubtless furnish the best of us with humility, as the natural effect arising from a sense of our great imperfection in the discharge of it. However composed the conscience may sit under the enquiry of *What* sins have we committed? — what shall we do with the question, *What* good have we done, answerable to our station and abilities?

What will those do with this question, who bestow all their thoughts and all their abilities only on themselves? who are so intent upon their own happiness, that they have no eye towards the happiness of others, unless it be a jealous one, lest the happiness of others should rise to eclipse their own. Such men feel not a disposition to assist the honest wishes
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of others — 'tis well, if they be not deaf to their distresses. — If their benevolence reaches so far, there it stops — as if it was only for themselves to be happy, and sufficient for others not to be miserable: whether it be pride or avarice that possesses them, the effect is the same, they both bring a callosus over the heart, which destroys that sensibility of temper from whence benevolence arises, and makes them indifferent at what falls *around* them, provided it does not fall *upon* them. — Under such indifference, it is very true, indeed, they are sheltered from many uneasinesses, which the benevolent man feels; but then they lose the benevolent man's pleasure, which far surpasses the richest pleasures of pride — the godlike pleasure of making happiness.

To come at this pleasure, we must lay aside pride, and seek it through humility; for if we have not humility, if we will not come down from a love of ourselves, we shall hardly meet with a love for others to influence our conduct.

It should set us forward in our endeavours after this amiable duty, to reflect, not only on the authority, but on the example,
of

of him who hath enjoined it. The act of Christ, in loving and saving mankind, is shewn us, not merely to raise our wonder, which it cannot fail exciting, or to call for our adoration, which we cannot refuse him, but, after shewing us where we are to seek our salvation, to shew us where we are to direct our love — to him who hath saved us, and to those whom he hath saved, the latter being the most natural expression and significant testimony of the former; for we cannot better testify our love of a friend, whose eminence sets him above the reach of our services, than by loving and serving those whom he loves; — and Christ hath expressly given his judgment on the point — “Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have shewn love and regard unto mine, ye have shewn it unto me.”

So clearly does the act of Christ, in loving us all, point out to us that we all ought to love one another; and the great humility of Christ attending this act is an example, which (though we can never equal it) we ought always to imitate — as far as we can; — it is an example, which, in the strongest manner, sets this great lesson before

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us — that, the highest eminence of condition ought to be no bar to the communication of love to those beneath us ; and that, as we can no way better please and honour Christ, than by imitating him, so we can no way more expressly imitate him, than when we *humble ourselves to do good to one another.*

S E R M O N XXXIII.

PURITY OF LIFE.

ROMANS xiii. 13.

Let us walk honestly, as in the day.

IN my last discourse I took notice, that the duty belonging to this season of Advent is to prepare ourselves for celebrating Christ's coming among us, by that love, humility, and purity of behaviour, which he came to teach, and which he expects from us. This duty, I observed, will be best discharged by an examination of our conduct, how we are performing the duties we owe to others, and to ourselves. With respect to others, I observed, that our whole duty is comprised under the general heads of justice and benevolence; where every man may find business in enquiring, if not how far he may have been injurious

rious to others, at least how far he may have failed in being beneficial to them. Such reflections on the duty we owe to others will lead us to humility; since, however clear we may stand from the charge of injustice, yet, when we reflect what good we have done, and what we might have done, we shall most of us feel more reason for humility than pride, from our very imperfect discharge of a duty, which Christ hath so expressly enjoined, and so strongly enforced by his own example.

As reflections on the duty we owe to others will lead us to humility, reflections on the duty we owe ourselves will lead us to purity, the proper attendant on humility.

It is an observation that may be made, from viewing the great imperfection of human virtue—that we are scarce more defective in feeling a love for others than we are in shewing a proper love for ourselves; nor do the vices of injustice and unkindness more spoil the happiness of our neighbour, than the vices of sensuality do our own. There is indeed that connection between these vices, that the latter are a natural introduction to the former—as the sensual man, who restrains not his passions from hurting himself, cannot depend upon his restraining them from hurting
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ing his neighbour, whom we are commanded to love as ourselves — and if we love him as little as, in these instances we love ourselves, we are as liable to hurt him as ourselves; and it will be difficult to point out where sensuality does not in some way or other, in some degree or other, lead to the hurt of others. But suppose our indulgence in sensuality does not carry us beyond the bounds of justice and benevolence, it certainly carries us beyond the bounds of Christianity; if we hurt not others, we both hurt and shame ourselves, as we behave quite inconsistently with the religion we have received from Christ, and with the judgment we expect from him.

The vices which the apostle enumerates — “rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness, envying and strife” — every one can easily understand how much they comprehend, as well as how much he himself is concerned in them; only we may take notice of the order in which the apostle has placed them; — we see that sensuality, as it begins with intemperance, so it leads in the end to strife — agreeable to what I just now said, that sensuality tends to public mischief, which is therefore a caution for stopping it in its first step, as we see where it may lead us.

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The apostle's advice is, that, laying aside such irregularities, "we walk honestly, *as in the day.*"

A very significant manner of recommending that sobriety and purity of behaviour which becomes our Christian profession; living, as we do, under the meridian light and instruction of the gospel; where a sensual and wicked behaviour is as open and offensive as indecencies committed in the face of the sun, at noon-day. The expression points at the regard men naturally shew for decency and consistency of character in their ordinary behaviour among each other, where they seek only the esteem of the world, where the character they would maintain is but temporary, perhaps trifling, as where nothing is at stake but mere reputation. — From whence the inference is obvious and strong, for shewing at least an equal regard for our behaviour, where we seek the approbation of God, where the character we are to maintain is of the utmost importance, and our eternal welfare depends upon our behaving as becomes it.

Yet, obvious and strong as this inference is, we see how often it is disregarded, and how much more solicitous some are for maintaining their worldly characters, than they are for living

living up to their Christian character. They will study to deceive, rather than they will choose to offend men, on whom so little depends—but are regardless of God, on whom their eternal welfare depends, whom they cannot deceive, and whom therefore they seem not to care how much they offend.—It were hard to determine, whether of the two offers the greater affront to God, the hypocrisy with which we would deceive him, or the spirit with which we dare to offend him; but this it is easy, and true, to say—that the conduct we are to maintain consistent with our Christian character, the honesty with which we ought to walk under the bright day-light of the gospel of Christ, is an honesty and purity both of behaviour and of heart.

We live not under heathen darkness, ignorance, and error, but under the clearest revelation of God's will, under our fullest and last call to salvation. God hath formerly spoken to mankind, rising early and calling them to duty—sending prophets after prophets; and when in these last days he hath sent unto us his Son, surely he has reason to expect—“they will reverence my Son.” The Jews, we know, “cast him out of the vineyard.”

“and slew him;” and the punishment they met with for so doing shews, at what rate God sets his blessings and his mercies, and at what hazard men reject his calls.

However some may despise and others neglect the gospel, yet nothing is surer, than that the greater instruction we have received in the knowledge of our duty, the greater is our obligation to a suitable discharge of it; and though some care not to make this the rule of their own behaviour to God, it is what they strenuously expect from such as owe obedience to *them*; where, if their reproof does not run before their instruction, at least it loiters not after repeated and improved instructions. The explicit declaration of God's will which we have in the gospel — the gracious method he hath there set forth for the salvation of man — the means he hath appointed for pardon of our sins, and for supplying us with strength in the pursuit of goodness — all this set before us on divine authority, and with the utmost clearness, absolutely precludes all plea from ignorance or disability in the discharge of our duty, and leaves us open to the condemnation we are so ready to pass on those from whom we expect that duty which we have taken much pains

to shew them, and have set before them great encouragement and assistance for their performance of it.

What then shall we do with the condemnation we must expect from God, who hath thus shewn us our duty? — for this light of Christ's gospel, by which we are commanded to walk, is the law by which Christ will hereafter judge us. Those indeed who set up the plea and profession of natural religion, flatter themselves, and would persuade others, that there is no occasion for the gospel of Christ, and that a due regard for natural religion will save them — as if they were hereafter to be judged by a law of their own choosing. — But this will not be the case; and those who now think fit to reject the authority of Christ's gospel, will one day find that they have not destroyed it; they will find that the great light of its instruction will be placed to their account, because God hath set it before them; and that God will judge them by it, though they have refused to live by it.

But the good Christian will live by it, and in it; and when he sees that Christ, who hath so plainly given him his duty in his precepts, is leading him, by his own example

and assistance, to the performance of it, he will feel every motive for imitating him, which his love for Christ, his honour for him, his own honour, and his own happiness, can suggest to him. The apostle emphatically expresses this duty of imitating Christ, when he bids us "put on the Lord Jesus Christ."—If we call ourselves followers of Christ, doubtless we should endeavour to resemble him, by putting on those virtues, which were so conspicuous in his example. It is true, we can no more exactly copy the purity of Christ, than we can his humility; but the more diligently we study to imitate his meekness, moderation, sobriety, piety, and benevolence, short as we may come of him, we shall greatly improve ourselves, shall daily advance in virtues becoming our profession here, and shall be qualified for his acceptance hereafter—who hath left us his example to follow, not to equal, and who will be ready to take those to himself, who have sincerely endeavoured to be like him.

Important and necessary as this duty is, we are too apt to slumber over it;—the apostle applies his advice to us, as being in such state, with respect to our duty, when he bids us
awake

awake to a discharge of it. — With too many of us this whole life is but a sleep, in which we pursue a series of delusive incoherent dreams — lay inactive to the great business for which we are sent here — and exposed, naked, and defenceless against the many dangers that threaten our spiritual condition: and such as by some friendly disturbance are awakened from this sleep, before they quit this vale of life, look back, not with pleasure, on their dreams, but with concern that they have dreamt; — they feel themselves in a hurry, like those who have overslept themselves, and rise — (they are afraid) too late for business.

There is a consideration, which should naturally awake us from this sleep — “the night is far spent, the day is at hand.” The great darkness of sin and ignorance, which once lay heavy on mankind, has been driven away by the coming of Christ, and we who live under the light of his gospel see the day spring which “from on high hath visited us;” the dawn of that happiness and glory, which is prepared for us, if we honestly walk by that light under which we live. The nearer we approach to day, the more attentive should be our expectation, the more busy

our preparation, for it — to meet that day of glory and happiness, with respect to which our present state is but a night — and that a dark one; the shortness of which, even in its utmost extent, is a circumstance, that should awaken our diligence, when we reflect, that in this short span of life we are to prepare ourselves for an eternal one. — Yet is there time enough for our work, if we will apply it; and great reason have we to thank God, who hath so graciously ordered, that the work of so short a space, if diligently performed, should be rewarded with happiness for ever.

Let us “awake then, we who sleep, and “Christ shall give us light.” — ’Tis time with all — ’tis more than time with many. — Many of us find ourselves advanced in life — the night, in which we have been dreaming, is far spent, and we see the dawn of the next life beginning to break upon us. It is surely then high time to be prepared for the approach of him, who is coming in that light — that he may find us busy in those duties which he hath set us, and clothed with those virtues which alone can qualify us for meeting him.

If we have walked honestly through this life, we shall go comfortably into the next,
and

and shall leave the world, as a wise man leaves a feast — satisfied, but not surfeited. If we have made Christ's religion our guide through the duties of our several stations, we shall find it our support, when we come to resign them. Then shall we feel the blessed influence of our Christian faith, when it speaks peace to our departing souls; when, under an humble penitence for our past sins, and our hearty application for pardon, it sets Christ's mediation in full view before us, and we see our Redeemer, the Son of God, ready to receive us, and conduct us to the Father.

God grant us all this happy exit out of life, for his sake, who hath wrought, with his blood, to open it for us! — To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all praise, honour, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

and shall leave the world, as a vessel of clay,
a tent — mortal, but not corruptible. All we
have made Christ a religion, and a religion through
the church, and the church through Christ. XXVII and
in our support, when we come to resign them.
Therefore, we feel the blessed influence of
our Christian faith, when it speaks peace to
our departing souls; when, under an humble
penitence for our past sins, and our hearty ap-
plication for pardon, in this Christ's mediation
in full view before us, and we see our Redeemer,
the Son of God, ready to receive us, and con-
duct us to the Father.
God grant us all this happy exit out of life,
at his late, who hath wrought with his
blood, to open it for us! — To whom, be-
lieve the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed
all praise, honour, and glory, for ever and
ever. Amen.
In the former view
Christ's redemption. In the former view
there is much to be seen, and of the work
and dignity of his name, as we
are persons, and as we are
but in the latter view, we see how he

S E R M O N XXXIV.

THE ADVANTAGE OF MAN'S
REDEMPTION.

P S A L M viii. 4.

*Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful
of him?*

THIS question may well arise, when we consider man only in his natural condition and character, as made for the purposes of this life, and enjoying the ordinary blessings of God's providence. But it arises with greater propriety, when we consider him in his religious character, as intended for another life, and enjoying the blessings of Christ's redemption. In the former view there is much to observe, both of the weakness and dignity of the human nature, as we are rational, but very imperfect creatures; but in the latter view, such observations become

come stronger, when we consider our moral depravity, the means that are applied for our salvation, and the future glories that are set before us.

When we reflect on our own depravity, we may well say, How *despicable* a creature is man! — yet when we reflect on the work of our redemption, and on the person who was engaged in it, we may well say, How *dignified*, how *exalted* a creature is man!

This question offers itself whenever we think of the birth, the life, the doctrine, the death, of Christ; but especially when we consider his ascending up into heaven in our nature and sitting down at the right hand of God. — This is an event full of wonder and of comfortable instruction. — It must have been so to his disciples, who saw it, and is no less so to us, who believe it, if we consider it as we ought to do. By this great event man is reconciled to God—our human nature is exalted—and we are assured of being called up to heaven, if we are but careful to make ourselves fit for it.

A state of reconciliation implies a previous state of displeasure. Whence this displeasure of God against man arose, and how fatal it was, we are not at a loss to know. A pure
and

and holy being (such is God) cannot approve of sin — must highly disapprove of it; consequently God must be displeased with sinners; and, as he is a just being, they must be obnoxious to punishment from him. And, if any credit is due to what we read, or to what we see of mankind, they have been sinners from the beginning. Hence arises God's displeasure against man; and it is useful to reflect on this, which is the cause of God's displeasure against us, that we may the more sensibly feel and admire his mercy, in honouring those who have so much dishonoured him. Such reflection will hold us from imputing our salvation to any righteousness of our own, and, as it shews us the excess of his free love towards us, will prompt us with gratitude and love towards him.

So desperate once was the state of man, in consequence of sin, and God's displeasure against it, that he was within a very little of being entirely removed from the earth on which God had placed him. — “ Noah found grace
“ in the eyes of the Lord, for he was a just
“ man, perfect in his generation, and walked
“ with God.” And God said unto him,
“ The end of all flesh is come before me, for
“ the earth is filled with violence through
I “ them,

“ them, and behold I will destroy them with
“ the earth. — But with thee will I establish
“ my covenant.” God here expressly shews
Noah the cause of that destruction he was
bringing upon the earth, not merely to justify
his own conduct, but that Noah, being
thus informed, might communicate it to
others, and thereby, if possible, lead them to
repentance and a better conduct.

Yet this same creature man, who once was
condemned, as unworthy of a place on earth,
by the ascension of Christ is advanced to
heaven; and, what is remarkable, man (that
is, human nature) on whose account the cherubims
were once set to forbid his return into
paradise, by the ascension of Christ is seated
in heaven above the cherubims themselves.

We may well wonder at this; and naturally
ask, How comes this about? how comes
it that those who were enemies to God, who
once so justly felt his displeasure, should yet
be thus highly advanced? How was this en-
mity removed? how was this displeasure ap-
peased? The answer is as wonderful, as the
question is natural — St. Paul gives it us in a
few words: — “ All these things are of God;
“ who hath reconciled us to himself by
“ Jesus Christ. God was in Christ, recon-
ciling

“ciling the world unto himself, not imput-
“ing their trespasses unto them.” The apostle
proceeds in very strong terms :—“ Now then
“we are ambassadors for Christ; as though
“God did beseech you by us : we pray you,
“in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”
2 Cor. v. 18.

This is wonderful ;—our peace, it seems, is
made with God, not by our laying aside any
unjust resentment of ours against him, but by
God’s calling us to his reconciliation, who
was so justly angry with us. God, who is
injured, exhorts us to be reconciled! Here
surely we see God, as the father, the loving
father of mankind! And when, in conse-
quence of this truly paternal love, God thought
fit to appoint a mediator between himself
and mankind, it increases our wonder, when
we find that the Son of him who exhorts us
to be reconciled is appointed to this office. It
was not a man, it was not an angel, it was
not an archangel, it was not any of those
blessed spirits that are nearest to the throne of
God—but it was the eternal Son of his bosom,
the work of whose mediation was as won-
derful as his love and condescension in under-
taking it.

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The work of any mediation must be suited to the nature of that enmity which it proposes to remove. The enmity between God and man consisted of two parts; God was angry with man, man was disobedient to God. For removing this enmity, the Son of God assumed human nature, and in that nature so wrought his mediation, that he pacified the divine anger, and restored man's obedience.

“Christ,” says the apostle, “redeemed us, bought us out from the curse of the law, by dying on the cross.” The curse of the law was death — “In the day that thou eatest thou shalt die;” — Adam eat and died; and “in Adam all die.” But Christ interposed, and, by his undergoing death for the disobedience of man, rescued him, not from dying, but from death — not from the dust, whither man was sentenced to return, but from that death, which, had not Christ interposed, would have for ever held him there. But, in virtue of Christ's interposition, man shall rise again from the dust, and “as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.” And as Christ's mediation, by his death, wrought for removing the anger of God against man,

so

so it wrought for recovering man's obedience to God, by his instruction and assistance—by shewing him his duty and encouraging him to perform it.

Thus did Christ remove the enmity between God and man, employing his whole course of life on earth in doing, suffering, and promoting what was necessary for the recovery of fallen man—for leading him into friendship with God, who had been estranged to him, and recommending him to God's favour, who had been the object of his indignation.

Having done this for us, Christ ascended up to heaven, in our human nature—in that nature which had been obnoxious to the divine displeasure, but which, being now reconciled by his mediation, he presented before the Father in his own person, thereby presenting the whole race of mankind to God, and dedicating us all to his acceptance, as the whole harvest is dedicated by offering the first fruits of it.

Christ was truly and properly the first fruits of human nature, though Adam was the first man. For the first fruits is not strictly the first produce, but the best produce. In the Levitical law the first fruit of trees
for

for food was the fruit of the fourth year, the fruit not being reckoned in perfection till then, before which it was not to be eaten or offered; because man was not to be served before God, and God was not to be served with what was not perfect. Adam, then, who was the first man, yet, being full of sin, was not fit to be set before God as the first fruits of human nature; but Christ, though he took our flesh long after Adam, yet, being without sin, and perfect, was truly the first fruits of our nature.

And this Christ offered to God at his ascension into heaven — an offering highly acceptable to God, as well for its own perfection, as for his merit who offered it. — So acceptable it was, that God not only received it, but placed it by him on his throne, and said — “Sit thou on my right hand.”

Here let us pause, and reflect a little — for surely a greater subject cannot employ the thoughts of man. — To what nature did God say, “Sit thou on my right hand?” Even that nature, which once had this sentence passed upon it — “Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return.” Human nature, once thrown down to the dust, is now advanced to heaven; and, as if it were not enough to sit down with
angels

angels there, we see it advanced above angels, above archangels, above cherubim and seraphim, above principalities and powers, nor stopping till it arrives at the throne of God, — there is no descending lower than man descended, nor ascending higher than Christ carried him: and the reflection from how low to how high a state we are advanced, should lead us to adore the redemption and mediation through which it has been brought about; and which angels admire, though men overlook it; — were angels subject to envy, this might move it, when they see their own creation outdone by the redemption of man, and find, that, high as they are seated in the regions of light and bliss, they must look down on man for the full discovery of God's power, love, and glory.

Nor should we only adore the mediation, by which man is thus highly advanced in heaven; we should be careful and jealous that we lose not this advancement, and study to make ourselves fit for the presence of God, when Christ shall come again to conduct us thither.

This is the lesson we are to learn from the ascension of Christ — To live up to the dignity, thus conferred upon our nature, and to

the expectation, here given us, of being called up to live eternally in the presence of God. We are to remember, that God hath not only made us, but re-made us;—Shall this double property, which God hath in us, be lost? and will it not be more than double madness in us to destroy it?

We are very apt to reproach each other, we are ready to reproach ourselves, when, in any instance of our worldly conduct, we act beneath our character. If a man be born to a great estate, or advanced to a dignified station, he thinks it a matter worth his whole attention to maintain a suitable opinion of himself, both in his own mind and in the minds of others. This is doubtless right in all stations of life, and of good use in keeping men to a proper behaviour. To act as becomes our character is wisdom, well pleasing to others, as well as ourselves; as, on the other hand, to have no regard for our character is both disgusting to others and ruinous to ourselves, and is in short the finishing stroke of folly. This principle operates so quick and sensibly upon mankind, that, with respect to their situation here, they are more likely to act above than beneath their character. Hence springs most of the pride observable in the world;

world ; — a bad effect, no doubt—which yet we see, like many other bad effects, arises from the abuse of what is good. It is pity, that, sensible as we are of this principle, even to excess, in what belongs to this world, we should be so insensible of it in what belongs to the next ; that we should scorn to let ourselves down from such diminutive eminences of character as we make among ourselves, yet take so little care in acting up to the exalted character which God hath given us, by the ascension of Christ, of being candidates for heaven, and entitled to sit with him in his glorious and eternal kingdom.

There is certainly more in this character, than should be wantonly thrown up to the lusts of the world ; there is enough in it, for inciting our emulation to live as becomes it, at the expence of even the best enjoyments the world can afford, when set in competition with it. Indeed too many of what the world calls enjoyments suit not even the character of a man, much less the character of an immortal being, intended for the presence of God and our Redeemer. And for those enjoyments of the world which are not destructive of our heavenly character, and the hopes which are there set before us, they are certainly not to

be compared with them, and therefore, though noticed by us, deserve not our attention — much less our affection.

We cannot but think, and should think seriously, that as Christ (by his ascension), hath set man in the character of a candidate for heaven, and joint-heir with him in his kingdom of happiness, so he will require of us, that we act up to this august character. — What said the angels to the disciples, whilst they were steadily gazing on their Lord's ascension? — “This same Jesus, which
“ is taken up from you into heaven, shall so
“ come, in like manner as ye have seen him
“ go into heaven.” — To what purpose, think we, will he come — but to make enquiry, how we have acted up to the dignity he hath conferred upon our nature, and how we may deserve the happiness and the glory he hath purchased for it?

Let us then, at all times, place ourselves, by reflection, at that important point of time, when we must answer this enquiry; — and, as we must needs earnestly wish for a good confidence in answering it *then*, when it will be put to us, let us as earnestly prepare ourselves for answering it *now*, whilst we only think of it — because, so surely as we can think of such

such enquiry, so surely will it be set before us.

With this persuasion on our minds, then, let it be our constant study to behave suitably to the dignity to which we are redeemed. When Christ hath done so much for us, gratitude, as well as interest, calls loudly upon us, not to frustrate his work of love by our own obstinacy or carelessness, but diligently to follow where he leads us, and to deserve what he hath so dearly purchased for us. Christ hath plainly shewn us the path, in which we are to follow him, through the duties he has laid down to us in his gospel. The study of these is our truest wisdom, and the practice of them will be our truest happiness. If our hearts be honestly employed on these, and we be careful, amidst the business of this life, to keep our attention fixed on what awaits us hereafter, we act as becomes our Christian character, we behave as the sons of God, and brethren to him who has made us so—and shall be received as such, notwithstanding the present low and imperfect condition of our nature;—a circumstance which should indeed make us humble, but not diffident; sensible of our own unworthiness, but

at the same time thankful for the goodness of God, who, by accepting our nature, in the person of Christ, to the highest honour, sufficiently testifies, that he has the greatest blessings in view to bestow upon mankind.

S E R M O N XXXV.

THE DUTY OF SETTING A GOOD
EXAMPLE.

1 CORINTHIANS X. 24.

Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

THIS translation of the text seems inaccurate. There is no mention of *wealth* in the original; and, should we understand it according to the common notion of that word, the apostle would seem to give very strange advice. The text, a little enlarged, runs thus — “ *Let no man seek only his own good, in what he does, but let every man consult another's good as well as his own.* ”

Great part of this epistle is taken up in answering some questions, which had been proposed to St. Paul for his determination. They related to certain liberties of behaviour,

both in public worship, and in common conversation, which some thought were unbecoming a Christian purity, whilst others defended them as innocent, and allowable. One of these questions was — Whether a Christian might be allowed to partake of the heathen idol feasts?

This the stricter sort of Christians condemned; whilst others defended it, upon this plea — that so long as they knew how to distinguish between the sacrifice and the feast that followed it, so as not to join in the worship, there was no harm in partaking of the entertainment.

•But the apostle does not admit this plea — He tells the Corinthians, that, admitting these idol feasts to be innocent, to those who used them with discretion, yet, as their example might betray others into sin, who had not that discretion in the use of them, and who might follow it, though they were persuaded it was wrong, it was their duty to abstain from them. — Many things may be *lawful* that are not *expedient*.

Something farther should be considered in our behaviour, besides the mere lawfulness of what we are doing. We should consider what good or bad consequences may arise from it.

And

And in such consideration we are not to confine our thoughts to ourselves, but should extend them to others, who may be influenced by our conduct. Therefore (says the apostle) Let no man seek only his own security in his conduct, which should be so regulated that others may be the better, at least not the worse, for it.

We are framed for the observance and imitation of each other's conduct. This may be both the necessary result, and the necessary support, of that social and dependent state, in which God hath placed us. — However that be, imitation is certainly a very early and active principle within us. This leads us into actions, long before reason enables us to choose them; and, all through life, when reason enables us to choose our actions, 'tis seldom foremost in forming our conduct; the example of others leads us into this or that train of action, and it is well, if, after example has directed our choice, we will permit reason to examine what we have chosen.

As this disposition of mankind so strongly leads us to the observance of each other's conduct, the duty of shewing a good conduct, at least of not shewing a bad one, is plain, urgent, and extensive,

If

If we are under the general duty of loving our neighbour as ourselves, and of promoting each other's good in every instance of our power, the obligation certainly lies the strongest, in the strongest and most important instances; and we shall fail in our discharge of this duty, if, whilst we observe it in smaller instances, we neglect it in greater. We relieve the necessities, we assist the conveniences, of each other; we promote many things which tend to the general advantage of the society we live in; — all this is right, and very well. But there is a method of doing good to those about us, which is of greater importance than all these, which does not, like these, depend on such means as are not equally in every man's reach, but are within all men's abilities to apply.

To save a soul from sin is the strongest instance of love to our neighbour that can be shewn, and sets us the nearest to that great example of love, who came down from heaven to save all mankind from sin.

It is in every man's power to promote this general good, by taking a proper care of his own behaviour; — he may save his neighbour's soul from sin by shewing him a good example,

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at least he may be careful not to draw him into sin by shewing him a bad one.

There is, 'tis true, a material difference in the immediate effect arising from these two sorts of conduct. The benefit arising from a good example may be precarious and distant; for, prone as men are to imitation, they are less prone to imitate what is good, than they are to imitate what is bad. But then, as we have discharged our duty, both to ourselves and others, in shewing a good example, so we shall be allowed the full merit of it, whatever becomes of its success, which depends on other causes, not on our conduct. — On the other hand; as those about us are always prone to *take* encouragement for sinning, and as it is certainly criminal to *give* encouragement, the withholding a bad example has a certain and immediate benefit attending it. It deprives others of an additional motive, which would hasten their progress in sinning, and may give a check to those they already feel. — But whether the withholding a bad example operates with a benefit on others or not, it certainly operates with this benefit on ourselves, that it saves us from the guilt of encouraging other men's sins.

A guilt, which, perhaps, we are not so careful

careful to avoid as we should be—and which we are most apt to incur in those parts of our conduct where we are the least aware of it. In actions grossly bad and sinful we are ready, if not to be upon our guard against them, at least to own the mischief in giving an example of them; but there are many actions in our lives, which, because they are, or we think they are, not *sinful*, give us no trouble of enquiry how far they may be *prudent*;—but, persuading ourselves that they are innocent parts of our own conduct, we care not how far they may be the occasion of wrong conduct in others.

This is not seeking the wealth, or good, of others—which is what the apostle recommends; nor indeed is it seeking our own; for we shew as little care of ourselves, as we shew love of others, when what we are doing tends to their hurt, which in most cases will recoil upon ourselves, and, in this case, all that mischief will recoil upon us, which belongs to the guilt of betraying another into sin; which the apostle calls “sinning against Christ;” and declares, for his part, that if any action of his, otherwise indifferent, should be the means of betraying another into sin, he would never apply it as long as the world stands;—

“ If

“ If meat make my brother to offend, I will
“ eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I
“ make my brother to offend.”

We cannot follow a better example than the apostle's, nor for a stronger reason than he has given. Let us but remember for whom Christ died, and thence learn, for whom we ought to live. It certainly is high contradiction to Christ's gracious work of love in saving mankind, when by our behaviour we betray those into sin, whom he came to recover from it, and to that end directed every action, not only of his life, but of his amazing death.— Let no man then glory in his own strength, so as to despise or overlook the weakness of others; and, whilst we all stand examples and imitators of each other's conduct, let no one judge of his own actions as confined wholly to himself, but let him consider them as reaching to the use or abuse of others—and thence let him learn to regulate his conduct, not merely by his own knowledge, but by the ignorance and weakness of those within whose notice he stands.—“ Knowledge puffeth up,” as the apostle tells us; and, so long as a man compares his actions but with one rule of judgment, his own conscience, it may raise his vanity, in finding them always right; but

we should examine our actions by the conscience of others, as well as our own, by which rule we shall find them often wrong, if we do not endeavour to adapt them to their weakness, as well as our own strength; — from this comparison will arise, not vanity, but charity; as the former of which puffeth up, so the latter edifieth — that is, directs us to such care of our actions, that, since others stand ready to use them, they may have only such within their reach as they can use to their advantage.

We must look not only at the principles but at the consequences of our actions — and must take care, not only to justify our own use of them, but to prevent the abuse of them in others.

This, you will say, is a difficult task. It is so; so difficult, that none perhaps ever accomplished it. Those who have watched their conduct with the strictest care, and directed it with the nicest regard to others, have still more or less wounded the weak consciences of their brethren, and that too through a want of reasonable care in themselves, rather than from an unreasonable abuse in others. Doubtless we fall as far short of perfection in this, as we do in other duties — but still, it
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is a practicable duty ; and, though it may be difficult to practise it, to the height of perfection, and be always upon our guard, yet there are many instances in our conduct where we readily follow it without difficulty, though we do not follow it so far as we should.

In those cases, for instance, where the behaviour of others affects ourselves, where our own interest or mischief is connected with their good or bad behaviour, we think it reasonable, and find it not difficult, to direct our actions by a consideration of the use which others may make of them. But in such cases it is mere policy, not a love and regard for others, that puts us upon this duty ; for, take off the connection which fastens our interest to the behaviour of others, and you take off the restraint by which we regulate our own behaviour. We then consider no farther of any action, than whether it satisfies our own conscience and judgment, and think ourselves very little if at all concerned, whether others are the better or the worse for it.

Yet, a charitable love and regard for the welfare of others, such as the apostle recommends in my text, and such as he felt, will prompt us farther in the application of this duty,

duty, beyond the scanty limits of barely serving ourselves by it. It will prompt us to promote the real, that is the spiritual good of others, whether our own temporal good be dependent upon them or not. It will direct us, in our behaviour, not only to look at others, but to examine how they look at us, and, accordingly, to shew them such conduct of our own as they can rightly understand, and which will instruct them to be good; as, on the other hand, to withdraw from their observation such conduct, however innocent or indifferent, which they might misunderstand, and which, for that reason, might draw them into sin. Such a principle as this within us will suggest, that we fall vastly short in our discharge of the general duty of doing all the good we can to others, whilst we do not abstain from that which does them the very greatest harm of all; for such and no less it is, when our conduct occasions them to fall into sin, the mischief and ruin of their souls.

The common plea in this case is a very bad one — that if others take wrong occasion by our conduct, and so are drawn into sin, 'tis their own fault; — so 'tis, doubtless — but are they the only persons in fault? He who makes use of an occasion for sin does one
wrong

wrong thing, but he who supplies that occasion does another; — and though the former be justly chargeable with a want of prudence; and is answerable for committing wrong, still the latter is chargeable with a want of charity, and is answerable for giving the occasion of it.

All this may be allowed; — but still we are told — that 'tis very unreasonable to deny one's self an innocent enjoyment; because, truly, others may make a wrong use of it.

So say thousands every day, in this gay, pleasure-taking age; — an age, in which it seems somewhat of the latest for preaching up the old-fashioned apostolic doctrine of consulting the moral and religious improvement of each other — of making others good by a good example of our own — and of cautiously withholding such examples as may betray lower and vulgar judgments into sin and mischief. — How far, and to what hurtful effects, the direct contrary maxims prevail — how busily we consult each other's improvement in vice and vanity — how fast we make each other wicked by example — and how industrious and curious we are in setting out every incitement that may corrupt

and mislead lower and vulgar judgments —
 I am not going to describe — because every eye
 sees it, and every sober heart laments it. —
 Instead of a useless description of modern
 life, full of offensive examples, let me shut up
 my discourse with setting before you (what
 comes with better propriety from the pulpit,
 and with much better authority than the
 preacher's), his declaration, before whom we
 must give an account of whatever we have
 done here; — Christ hath declared — “It must
 “ needs be that offences come; — but woe be
 “ to those by whom they come!”

S E R M O N XXXVI,

THE DUTY OF RETURNING GOOD
FOR EVIL.

ROMANS XII. 21.

*Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil
with good.*

THIS precept of the apostle's is found among many more, which recommend humility, mutual love, and such other virtues as are the dictates of reason, as well as the precepts of the gospel:—and no wonder it is, that the gospel precepts should be of this kind; for Christ came not to give us a different nature, but to make our conduct suitable to that we have; accordingly, he did not set aside the dictates of reason, but prescribed them.

It is inaccurate to suppose, that when Christ came, he improved the natural rule of mora-

lity. The improvement of morality as a rule of action is one thing, and the improvement of our conduct in acting up to that rule is another. Now it was not the former improvement, but the latter, which was the design of Christ's preaching. He did not improve, that is, he did not *enlarge*, the rule of morality, by adding more moral fitnesses than were subsisting before; but he improved men's abilities in acting up to that rule, by supplying them with stronger authority, plainer direction, and stronger motives for observing it. Christ indeed, by some positive commands, has enlarged our duty, but not the moral part of it—that he left as he found it; and the precept now before us is not what the gospel has added more than what natural reason could prescribe—but it is what the gospel has commanded beyond what human depravity could see, or approve, and beyond what human practice did ordinarily observe.

Some indeed go farther in their observation on this precept, and would persuade us, that it is not only more than what natural reason *could* prescribe, but that it is contrary to what it *hath* prescribed; that it is a precept inconsistent with equity, and which has more of *authority* than *reason* to support it.

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But this is very far from being true.

Our Saviour, in recommending this precept, does not derive its obligation merely from his own authority, but from a motive of natural reason. Our Saviour says — “ Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you ; ” — he does not say, Because I will have you do so — but, “ that ye may be the children of your father, who is in heaven.” This, we see, is a motive taken from natural reason ; for natural reason directs us to imitate the goodness of God as far as we can. God’s kindness to the ungrateful plainly shews, that ingratitude is not absolutely a reason for withholding kindness from those who are guilty of it ; for, was it so, God would not be kind to the ungrateful. On the contrary, as we observe this in the conduct of God, we must be persuaded it is right — and as we are naturally obliged to imitate the conduct of God, as far as we can, we must be persuaded it is our duty. — Thus natural reason will recommend the precept of returning good for evil, as it is an imitation of the conduct of God.

But reason will farther recommend this precept, as it is a duty of natural equity — such equity, I mean, as is due to God, though not such as the offender has any right to.

Those who think the precept before us to be inconsistent with equity, mean that it is so with respect to that relation which subsists between the offender and ourselves; but they forget the relation which subsists between God and ourselves; in which relation we may feel a call of equity on this occasion, though we feel none in the other: for, if God be kind to us, notwithstanding our ingratitude to him, it will be an equitable return to God—and the only return we can make him—for us to shew kindness to those who have used us unthankfully. Our Saviour has so determined it, in one of his parables. When the householder heard that the servant, to whom he had forgiven a large debt, was severe upon his fellow-servant for a small one—what does he say to him? “Oughtest thou not to have forgiven thy fellow-servant, even as I had forgiven thee?” This shews, that, in our Saviour’s judgment of the matter, the servant was obliged so to do, and that such obligation was founded on his master’s right to demand this behaviour from him, though his fellow-servant had no such right.

Thus our Saviour, we see, supports the precept of returning good for evil by arguments

ments drawn from natural reason — from the natural duty of imitating God, and the natural principle of equity towards God.

St. Paul uses the like method. He says — “If thine enemy hunger, feed him” — Why? — “for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head” — that is, thou shalt soften and subdue his disposition. This is a reason for the precept drawn from the natural utility or good effect attending the observance of it, as the former was taken from the natural equity belonging to it; and both together shew, that when our Saviour, and after him his apostle, enjoins the returning good for evil, he does not go beyond, much less does he contradict, the law of natural reason and equity; — the law of the gospel in this matter advances nothing but what is contained in the law of nature.

But though this precept be found in the law of nature, yet it is most effectually recommended to our observance by its being contained in the law of the gospel; because the former reasons for its observance are much heightened by the interposition of Christ's example and command, and because the gospel gives us a stronger view both of the equity and the utility of the precept.

Thus, if we are to return good for evil, that we may be the children of God, we are still more obliged to do so, that we may approve ourselves to be the followers of Christ, whose example in this matter was eminent and familiar among us. Upon this foot the precept not only presents itself to us with an additional reason for observing it, but shews itself more practicable, or within our reach. The mind may hesitate in proposing an imitation of God; the notions we have of his absolute perfections, and the sense we feel of our own weakness, may discourage us from attempting to imitate what lies so infinitely beyond us, and we may think it fruitless for man to pretend to act as God does; — but Christ has condescended to give us an example of this precept in our own nature, and so has brought it nearer within our imitation, by shewing us, that what man thus ought to do, is no more than what man is able to do. Nor will the superior circumstances of Christ's nature and condition above our own excuse our endeavours of imitating him, though they must exclude our hopes of equalling him.

Again; — If the instances of God's kindness, which we indiscriminately enjoy in our creation,

tion, and the daily blessings we enjoy under his preserving providence, be a reason, on which he equitably expects the like indiscriminate behaviour of kindness from us towards each other, whether thankful or unthankful, how much stronger does this reason grow under the consideration of Christ's love to us all in our redemption? how much more equitable still will be his claim upon us to shew love and kindness to our fellow-creatures, however undeserving, after he has shewn so much to us? The greatest want of merit in those, from whom we withhold our kindness, bears no comparison with that want of merit in ourselves in which his love found us and relieved us. We cannot forgive each other above a hundred pence, but Christ hath forgiven us five hundred talents.

Thus the natural reasons given by our Saviour for this precept, derive great additional strength in passing to us through his gospel; as we thereby feel ourselves obliged to the observance of it on the principle of imitating, not only the goodness of God, but the love of Christ — and on the principle of equity, in making a suitable return for the blessings, not only of our preservation, but also of our redemption.

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As to the apostle's argument, which is taken from the natural utility or good effect attending the observance of this precept — that is certainly stronger when we look at it in the gospel, than when we consider it by the light of reason; because, if love and kindness shewn to an enemy will mollify the heart of a man, it will surely find, not harder, but easier work in mollifying the heart of a Christian. — As the spirit of the gospel tends to improve the sentiments of humanity, it will tend to facilitate the success of such conduct as is founded on humanity.

But we have other encouragement from the gospel for observing this precept, as we are assured, that, besides its good effect upon others, it will infallibly redound with infinite reward to ourselves. This is a recommendation of the precept before us, which only the gospel can set out to us. Natural reason may point out the good effect which our kindness may have upon the hearts of men, and, so far as our welfare depends upon the hearts of others, may shew us a good effect redounding to ourselves from it; but as this is not a certain, though it be a good effect, so natural reason provides not a sufficient recompence in

case our kindness fails of this effect. But the gospel amply supplies this deficiency; and, besides making our work of kindness in general more successful, shews us the highest reward for it, even when it fails of its desired effect, as it shews us a seat at his right hand, whose precept we have followed, and whose eminent example we have endeavoured to imitate.

On this foot then stands the precept before us; — it is a precept founded in the law of nature, and strongly recommended and enforced by the example and the law of Christ. And I have set it out upon this double foundation, because, as it may appear a hard saying to many tempers, it cannot be too well supported — and because there are those, who on other accounts being not cordially affected to Christ's gospel, are ready to lay hold of this, as a handle for quarrelling with it; that its commands are unequitable; whilst others, who are inclined to judge with less severity of them, think, however, that they are too refined to be applied to practice. The former may be told, that they cannot object against the gospel upon this point, without impeaching natural religion also, since this command of Christ advances nothing more than what

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is really contained in the law of nature. And the latter may be told, that however such a command may be too refined for the dictates of impetuous passions, it is very consistent with the dictates of reason, religion, and prudence.

To the dictates of reason and religion, we may well add the dictates of prudence — for difficult precepts cannot be too strongly recommended.

Even a well-disposed Christian, though he may ask for no other argument for recommending the precept of returning good for evil, than that it is the will and command of Christ, may yet feel assistance in the practice of it from considering the prudential reasons that support it — the present advantages and good effects attending it.

We are not so spiritualized in this state, as to be above the influence of motives arising from temporal advantage. So long as we are inhabitants of this world, we must, in a proper degree, think and act as such — not forgetting, however, but always remembering, and well considering, that we are to be inhabitants of another.

Prudence is a virtue as necessary for conducting us through this world, as religion is necessary

necessary for conducting us through this into the next ; and the dictates of the one are as fit for the attention of an earthly being, as the commands of the other are necessary for the attention of a being, who is intended to be heavenly and immortal.

S E R M O N XXXVII.

The same Subject continued.

ROMANS xii. 21.

*Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil
with good.*

SO full as the world is of offences, it is a task beyond the reach and management of human prudence, so to conduct ourselves, that we may absolutely avoid meeting them; — all it can do is to prepare us for meeting them, and to direct us how we may manage them to the best advantage.

It is a material step of preparation for meeting offences from others, to give none ourselves. This disposition and conduct will carry us clear of many, though not of all, and will best qualify us for managing those we cannot avoid. For nothing hinders

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our cool judgment upon the offences we receive, like the consciousness we feel of those we have given. When there are faults on both sides, there will be anger on both sides, because each chooses rather to reproach the faults of the other than to confess his own; and the higher his anger rises against the faults of his adversary, the more he thinks to conceal his own. But when we meet with offences from others, and feel none of our own to discompose our judgment, and to put us on violent methods to disguise them, we then are at liberty to manage them with success.

In this situation we are at liberty to reflect wisely, rather than warmly, on the offence we have received; and the more consideration we give any offence, the more, perhaps, we may see reason for diminishing the malignity it appears to carry in it—at least we shall certainly see reason for not adding to the mischief that belongs to it by our resentment.

When we are at liberty to consider our conduct on these occasions, and attend to the suggestions of prudence, we shall find, that, whether we consider the offender or ourselves, reasons for kindness and forbearance will rise much stronger than reasons for resentment and revenge.

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When we consider the offender, there are but two things we can propose by pursuing him with severity and revenge; — his punishment, and his amendment. As to the former, however we may have the power, we may not have the right, to inflict it. The laws of society will step in between us and the offender, to claim this right, in public and grievous cases; and in private and less grievous cases, where the laws are inactive, it is some sort of hint that we should be so too. Especially as, where the laws of society are silent, the voice of God must still be heard; — “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.” And surely it is with no less kindness than justice, that God reserves this prerogative to himself, and forbids us to assume it; for there is nothing, with which man is less to be trusted, than the power of punishing his fellow-creatures. — I speak of a power of punishment entrusted in private hands, by which each man is at liberty to punish offences against himself as he thinks fit; — as to that power of punishment which is entrusted in the hands of the civil magistrate, this is necessary for the government of society, and is in reality the punishment which God himself inflicts, by the ministry of man; for the powers that be

are ordained of God, to them he delegates his authority "in bearing the sword for the punishment of evil-doers." But a power of private punishment is so far from being necessary for the good government of society, that nothing can be more destructive of it; and is so far from being the punishment which God inflicts, that it is the mischief which his great adversary the devil works among us.

As to the amendment of the offender, if that be really the motive of our conduct, prudence will direct us to use such means as are most likely to effect it. And surely kindness is a more likely means than severity and revenge;—by kindness is not meant unlimited kindness—for the same prudence which stops our revenge should direct our kindness; and when once we have conquered the former, it will be no difficult matter to manage the latter with discretion. Christ bids us "forgive our enemies," he bids us "do good to them," he bids us "love them, and pray for them." This indeed carries the duty higher than some are aware of, who think it sufficient so far to forgive an enemy as not to pursue him with vengeance, but do not think themselves obliged to bestow any sort of kindness

ness upon him, or who are very sparing and cool in the meanest services they do him; who, though they desire not his hurt who hath offended them, feel no wishes for his good, or inclination to promote it, and are very indifferent what becomes of him. Our Saviour, I say, certainly meant to carry us higher than all this. — But what then? Our Saviour certainly did not mean to carry our conduct towards our enemies so high as to throw down all distinction between friends and foes. When our Saviour bids us “do good to them that hate us,” he surely did not mean to bid us do hurt to those that love us—which yet must often happen, if, with such scanty power of doing good as is allowed us, we use not discretion in our benevolence towards those who have offended us. Such conduct might be as detrimental to society, and attended with as much injustice, as revenge. As common sense will not admit this, so it will easily point out, to each man in his respective station, how far he must go to satisfy Christ’s command, without going beyond it—how far he may discharge the duty of love towards his enemies, without violating the same duty towards others.

It should not discourage us from the duty

of being kind to those who have offended us, that such kindness too often fails as a means for making them behave better; — yet, there is good warrant and sufficient encouragement for our applying such conduct, if it naturally tends to this effect, if it succeeds in producing it oftener than it fails, and if where it fails it leaves us with full commendation, as it leaves the offender without excuse. — The matter then is in other hands — the judgment of the world is with us — Or, if the world overlooks us, the eye of Heaven will see, and the hand of Heaven will reward us.

Thus much for our conduct with respect to the offender; in whom we can propose nothing but his punishment and amendment — the former we may not have a right to execute, and the latter is better procured by kindness than by revenge.

If now we consider ourselves — all we can propose is satisfaction and security. This indeed revenge largely promises, but it mightily deceives us. Revenge, instead of affording us either satisfaction or security, destroys both; distaste, confusion, and horror are the genuine effects of revenge, when followed in a high degree — and even in the lowest, it is
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far from affording satisfaction. — When the storm of passion ceases, the mind does not enjoy, but sickens in the calm.

And as to security — we shall much better provide for it by kindness than revenge, which rather multiplies than removes our danger. We often pronounce upon the inefficacy of this conduct without trying it, and say 'tis to no purpose to try kind applications, because 'tis more to our own inclination to use harsh ones. Revenge is tempting, and, in the heat of passion especially, we cannot think of any other method of repelling the evil we suffer, than that which makes our adversary suffer in his turn. But this is repelling it with too much force — with so much as will make it rebound upon ourselves; and, instead of securing us against future mischief, does but instruct our enemy farther how he may annoy us. Revenge is contagious, and communicates the same poison to the heart on which it flies, as it brings from the heart from which it comes; and it is to little purpose, it may be to a very bad one, to oppress an enemy, if, whilst we hold the hand that is lift up against us, we farther provoke the heart that burns against us. — It is a hard work to hold the hands of an angry man; — subdue his heart, and his hands will drop

at once: so long as he expects nothing but mischief from us, he stands guarded at all points but one — where, if a kindness enters, he is vanquished.

Some are hurried to set aside their regard to the precept before us, by the fallacious pleasure which they expect in taking revenge, or, as they term it, in having satisfaction. But, there is nothing, which we may vainly propose to maintain by revenge, that is at all comparable to what we shall certainly secure by kindness. — What is that spirit, that honour of a man, which must be maintained at so extravagant expence? which some are so jealous to maintain, that they must needs feed it with the blood of others, at the hazard of their own? Whatever is this spirit, or however it may be valued, the tyger has more of it, and will better maintain it, than the bravest man of honour that ever drew a sword, who, when he has proved himself a beast, or worse, by spilling his brother's blood, dares not stand up against the tyger's wrath, to prove himself a man. — Such false notions of spirit, by which we copy savage beasts, are surely not comparable to that spirit of goodness and kindness, by which we resemble God.

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which we must follow, if we seek true satisfaction; for that is very falsely called so, which leaves us shocked at ourselves and afraid of others. But when we feel ourselves masters of our own passions, and, in consequence of that, superior to the passions of those who offend us—this is satisfaction;—when, after subduing our own hearts, we can subdue the hearts of others, and, by changing their hatred into love, can exchange our own fears for security—this is satisfaction;—when, instead of procuring the misery of others, at the expence of our own happiness, we advance the latter by preventing the former, and so walk united in peace, instead of falling united in destruction—this is satisfaction.

Men are loth to be thought cowards; and none more so, than those who are least sensible of true courage. The world is much abused with false notions of courage, when he is branded for a coward who refuses, or will not demand a duel, and he who accepts or demands it is honoured as a man of courage. Whereas, in truth, he is the man of courage who declines a duel, and he who accepts it is the coward; for he who declines it, despises the obloquy of the world, that he may approve himself to God, and chooses rather to be

be hissed at than damned; — but he who accepts a duel, so dreads the loss of his credit (among those too whose good opinion is of no value), that, to avoid it, he chooses to offend God and incur damnation. — If this be courage, we must strike it out of the catalogue of virtues, for nothing is virtue but what proceeds under the direction of prudence, much less is that to be esteemed virtue, or true courage, which is the highest madness and wickedness. — Courage is a firm and constant disposition of mind, *not to decline an evil*, when the submitting to it is the only *remedy against a greater*. True courage arises from greatness, not fierceness, of mind. — Solomon says — “ He that is slow to anger is better “ than the mighty, and he that ruleth his “ spirit, than he that taketh a city.” — If Solomon be not mistaken, there is more true courage and greatness of mind in pardoning an offence, than in resenting it; and those who dislike the remark, as mean and dastardly, will hardly shew more spirit, without shewing much folly.

If it argues greatness of mind to be not easily moved to anger, it argues the same to be easily pacified; for, whatever it be that so quickly puts us in motion at an offence, 'tis the
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Serm. 37. *The Duty of returning, &c.* 473

the very same which sends us too far, and too long after it. — Little and weak minds chafe and fret, and, like a reed, are worried with every blast of offence that blows; but great and strong minds, like the oak, stand unshaken with the attack, are safe themselves, and all is safe around them.

I will conclude with this observation — He is a fortunate man, who meets with no offences; but, he is a wise and a great man, who knows how to forgive them all.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

VOL. I.

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